

The author,
age of twenty
The earliest known
of the year

卷八
步
驥
勝

隨便用

最強の映画館



卷之三

10

10

步街几

勝利の歌

最強英雄

The soft green
age of thought
The troubled time is
the source
of the world
—Ruth



アラビア語

Burgund Haneiyuutan - Volume 01 Chapter 00-02

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Prelude: In a classroom

In a classroom[edit]

"As it stands, you will be expelled."

"Umm...professor. I could not hear very well. Could you please repeat it."

"You will be expelled, if you remain as is. That is the situation."

The voices of two individuals echoed in the small room. One of them is a confused voice of a young boy. In contrast, the other one is a calm voice of a mature woman.

"....I'm sorry. I still could not hear very well..."

"I understand that this may be shocking, but if you remain as is, you will be out. OUT. Do you understand? It's time for a reality check, Mr. Harvest."

"Um...so you will be fired from the school, if nothing is done?"

"How do you get that? The one leaving is you, of course! Why would I, the instructor, be fired?"

"I thought that it is understandable for an instructor who cannot satisfactorily teach an immature student, even driving him to expulsion, to be fired...."

Swish!!

The tip of a sword was right in front of the boy's eyes. The woman had drawn the sword she was carrying on her waist. The scary thing was, the boy had no idea when the woman drew the sword, let alone, put her hand on the grip. When he realized it, he found the tip of the sword almost touching his nose.

She had drawn her sword at a divine speed.

"If you talk back at me, I won't restrain myself."

"Yes, I am sorry, Miss Muska..."

The girl had no choice but to reply in a pitiful tone with cold sweat running

down his body.

Well, this woman wearing a sword on her waist.

It is a bit unsettling that she is arming herself with a sword, but it is not too odd considering her profession. She is a knight.

This is a knight's academy - as the name suggests, it is an educational institution to foster knights. This woman is a real knight, and an instructor at this school. This boy is a student at this school.

The name of this boy is Shun. He is a boy with black hair and eyes.

The name of the female knight is Muska. Her full name is Muska Nyan Fronti. She is a beauty with cool eyes and brown hair tied in the back. Her mature body is contained in the knight's uniform.

She is in her mid-twenties, and definitely passable as a gorgeous woman when she keeps her mouth shut. However, her face shows fatigue and somewhat lacks vigor.

"Ms. Muska, why am I going to be expelled?"

".... Are you seriously asking this?"

"Couldn't you at least tell me the reason?"

Seeing Shun talk without reservation made Muska look sour. Then, she put her hand on her chest, as though she is in pain, and took a small bottle out of the pocket of her uniform. She opened the bottle, took a pill out into the palm of her hand, and threw it into her mouth.

"Ms. Muska, is it the gastritis again?"

"Yes, it is. Having to take care of the problematic students is giving me head and stomach aches."

Muska's gastritis was well known among the students.

"Are you taking the medication as directed? It doesn't seem to be getting any better."

"I am taking it. A bottle a day."

"Isn't that too much...?"

"Recently, I started taking medication for stomach irritation for over medicating."

"That is a downward spiral."

"The number one culprit is shameless..."

Muska contorted her beautiful face to glare at Shun.

"Well, it's all right. In any case, I think it is difficult to believe that you can pass with your grades."

"But I have managed to pass thus far, and was able to become a third level student."

"It is easy to pass to the next level. If you enroll at the school, you can progress to the third level. However, in order to become a knight, you have to pass the final exit exam. Your current grades do not even qualify you to take the exam."

"I am trying hard..."

"Then how do you explain these grades?"

Bang! Muska slammed the desk. There was a bundle of papers on the desk; they were Shun's grades at this school.

"You are the last place in every theoretical subject, language, math, history, politics, magic engineering, military strategy, and culture. What do you think about these grades?"

"I am not very good at using my brain..."

He is also at the bottom in practical subjects: swordsmanship, fighting skills, strategy, basic fitness.



"What about these?"

"I am not very good at using my body..."

"There is nothing you are good at!"

Muska exclaimed, close to screaming. She held her chest with one hand, and her head with another.

"Frankly, these grades are unbelievable. I nearly cried when I was writing your grades in the report card."

"Actually, it's rather laughable. Hahahahaha."

"Really, is this funny? Am I that ridiculous? Worrying about your grades to the point where it is making my stomach hurt? Is it that funny?"

"I'm sorry, Ms. Muska."

This is bad. Muska is starting to lose it. Shun is finally realizing that he cannot get by with a smile.

Having Muska say all this, finally got Shun to realize that his position at the school is really at risk. He thought that he can automatically become a knight by simply enrolling in the Knight's Academy, but it doesn't seem to be that easy.

"Listen, Mr. Harvest. I will say this one more time. With your current grades, you will not be allowed to take the final exit exam, and you will be expelled in the near future."

"Is there anything I can do? I promised my dead parents that I will become a knight. If I get expelled, I cannot face my parents in heaven."

"I want to say that you did this to yourself. But it is not that I want to definitely expel you. In fact, I would like to have you at least take the final exit exam."

Shun clung to the words that came out of Muska's mouth.

"Then...."

"I will give you a one last chance."

Muska muttered with a slightly tired expression.

"I begged and begged and begged and begged and pleaded with every

instructor yesterday, and arranged for your special resit next week."

Apparently, she was tired from doing this.

"If you manage to score a passing grade in this resit.."

"I can become a knight?"

"No, that won't happen."

"What? Why?"

"Listen to me. If you manage to pass the resit, you will be eligible to take the final exit exam. You have to pass the final exit exam, in order to become a knight."

This, however, is significantly better than being expelled without being allowed to take the exam. Shun agreed.

"I will say it again. This is your last chance. Be sure to study hard."

"Well, it is not that I don't take the exams seriously. But during the exam, I hear a weird voice in my head, and I get distracted...."

"It is not even funny to say that you lose consciousness from lack of sleep. Be sure to take care of yourself before the exam and get some sleep."

"Yes, I understand. Thank you very much, Ms. Muska."

He is convincing only in his response. Muska muttered as she placed her hand on her forehead.

"If you understand, you can leave."

"I can?"

"I can keep giving you a long lecture, but instead, use the time to study and prepare for the resit. If you score poorly on the resit, I will not forgive you."

"Yes, thank you very much, Ms. Muska."

Shun bowed his head, and was about to leave the classroom when Muska called after him.

"Also, needless to say, you are in a precarious position at this school right now. If you are involved in a slightest problem, you will be expelled before taking the

resit."

"Yes, I know."

Chapter 1: The knight, the princess, and leaving school

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There is a continent called Burgund.

It is an expansive continent located in the center of a vast ocean. At the southern tip of the continent is a country whose name is the Kingdom of Juvren. Also known as the "Kingdom of Knights", just as the name suggests, it is a country that harbors many excellent knights. And one of the policies which it lends the most strength to is the rearing of knights.

Knights are people in possession of fighting prowess far in excess of the average human; to express it in one word, they are superhuman beings. They have become the main weapon in wars on the continent, and a country's strength is directly proportionate to the number of knights on its side.

The Juvren Royal Knight Cadet Academy — the Knight Academy for short. It is a facility located in the forest to the east of the kingdom's capital, and as its name suggests, is a school for rearing future knights.

Knights are not only soldiers, but are also involved in national government. It is a job that every boy and girl in the land aspires to. However, although there is a rush of tens of thousands of hopefuls wishing to enroll every year, only a handful of students will be able to become knights.

Continental History 795, the 4th month — There's not a trace left of the winter snow, and green shoots have begun to sprout between the withered shrubbery. Our story takes place in such a season.

In the school building of the Knight Academy, there is the Student Guidance Office; as the name implies, this is where the students can receive guidance. It's also the room where Shun, a problem child, is regularly called to. Today, he has been called again by his teacher, Ms. Muska, and threatened with expulsion if he keeps this up. Thanks to Muska, Shun is to take a resit instead, and he leaves the room with an "I'll do my best".

Shun's full name is Shunavran Norve Harvest. Being quite a long name, those

close to him just call him "Shun". A 15-year-old third year student at the Knight Academy, he wore the indigo blue sports jacket that comprised the Academy's uniform. His build was slightly smaller than average, and although he worked out a lot, he still looked very slender. With a messy crop of black hair, inherited from his father, he often had a gentle smile on his face. In an academy full of active students, his calm demeanor was his only unique feature. To put it nicely, he had a positive outlook, but to put it more bluntly, he was blindly optimistic. That's the boy called Shun. Being an important facility for the Kingdom of Juvren, there were also many students who were nobles or royals.

This is why the school building was so unimaginably gorgeous in Shun's eyes. The corridor that he was walking down at the moment was so large it could host a track race, the arched ceiling was high, and was constantly brightly lit by "magic fire". "Magic fire" was a technique born from "sorcery". The system of using the "element of magic" as power to induce light creates "magic fire". But it was barely a hundred years ago that it was commonplace to use lighting consisting of lamps that burned oil.

"Magic fire" could only be used by a handful of people called "sorcerers" who had the "element of magic". Things were different nowadays though. It was a time where "the element of magic" could be mass-refined artificially in factories. The benefit of sorcery", what should have been a trademark of "sorcerers", was now widely available to common folk. Therefore, what used to be called "sorcery" has been renamed to "magic engineering", and "sorcerers" ply their trade as technicians. Shun walked the corridor lit with "magic fire". The walls on both sides were made of white stone, and were polished so carefully that you could see your face in it. Beside the wall sat an array of works of art, with no expense spared, a painting framed in gold here, a suit of armor complete with sword there. On a whim, Shun stopped in front of a single painting. The painting was many times Shun's height, and depicted a giant dark shadow and a shining golden knight, two contrasting figures in a violent struggle.

It was titled "The holy battle of Godot Rue".

Several decades ago, there was a great war on the continent of Burgund. To the north of Burgund, across the sea, lies another continent. Its name, the "Dark Continent". As a land filled with demonic beings and creatures, Burgund had

long avoided any contact with it. But one day, the ruler of the “Dark Continent”, the “Demon Lord” brought a tremendous force of demons to bear upon Burgund. An all-out war broke out between mankind and demonkind. And mankind, due to the overwhelming strength of the demons and their “Demon Lord”, stood upon a precipice. Many knights waged battle on the “Demon Lord”, leading from the front of his army, but all were vanquished. This is because the “Demon Lord” was in possession of a “God Slayer”. “God Slayers” were arms of legend, said to have killed the very gods that created this world. Though its story was passed on as a dubious existence on Burgund, the “Demon Lord” bore the real thing.

Mankind was crushed by the tremendous strength of the “God Slayer”. At one point, more than half of Burgund had been seized by the demons. When all had given up hope against the might of the “Demon Lord” and the “God Slayer”, a miracle occurred. Suddenly, from the heavens, a knight wrapped in golden armor appeared, carrying none other than another “God Slayer”. The “Demon Lord”, angered by the appearance of another beside himself with a “God slayer”, challenged the golden knight in battle. The “Demon Lord” and the golden knight clashed viciously; such was the force of their clash that they destroyed each other along with their “God Slayers”, and disappeared. Having lost their leader, the “Demon Lord”, the demon forces broke down into disarray; it was thus that mankind was able to vanquish them in following battles. This battle was one that really occurred, known now as the Northern Invasion, and left its mark on human history as an odious memory. And the picture that Shun gazed upon, “The Holy War of Godot Rue” was a depiction of that most famous scene during the Northern Invasion, when the “Demon Lord” and the “Heavenly Knight” faced off.

Even now, no one really knows the identity of golden knight who appeared so suddenly. Some call him a messenger of the gods, a savior, but in time, he became known as the legendary warrior who saved mankind, the “Heavenly Knight”. The “Heavenly Knight” drawn in the picture showed him just as the story told, wrapped in golden, shining armor with a golden helmet that covered his face. In his hand was a golden sword as his valiant figure rose to the sky on golden wings. The dark shadow that stood against him was the “Demon Lord”. Though it still retained a humanoid form, the drawing reflected its grotesque and

evil appearance. Its jet black form, like an aggregate of shadow, could appear like a devil or an apparition. His long hands splits off into numerous branches, each one brandishing a vast number of weapons. According to legend, the “Demon Lord” had collected a number of “God Slayers”; the fact that he had mastery of them was also reflected in the drawing. Every time that Shun passed it, he always looked at it and thought, “Did the guy who drew this really believe that it existed? A monster that looked like that?” As Shun muttered, deep in thought, there was a voice. “Hey Shun, you done?” “Hmm? Oh hey Bui.” The voice belonged to a male student. The boy in the same Academy uniform as Shun had brown, spiky hair, and gave the impression of being more active than Shun. “Hey, were you waiting for me?” “Yeah sure, so what did Muska say?” “Well, if I don’t pass next week’s resit, I’m going to be expelled.” “Oh, woah, expulsion huh. Haha...I mean, not a laughing matter, is it!” quipped Bui, and Shun couldn’t hide a chuckle. This guy really was a loud one. His name was Bui I Banze, in the third year like Shun. In the same class since admission, they were also roommates in their dormitory, probably his closest friend in the Academy. “That’s risky, Shun. I mean, will you really be expelled?” “Sure, if I fail.” “How can you be so relaxed! Study! I’ll do everything I can, you have to pass that resit! I ain’t letting you get expelled!” “Bui...”

Shun couldn’t help letting out a voice, he was moved by his friend’s kindness. “You’re bottom the class! If you get expelled, it’ll be me that goes to the bottom of the pile! That’s not going to happen!” ...*what a selfish excuse. Shouldn’t have been so grateful.* “Well, I’ll study, but things will only go as they go, you know.” “Are you giving up?” “I won’t give up. Promised my folks I’ll definitely become a knight.” “I hear you...back in my hometown as well, it was carnival chaos just for me getting into the Academy. Everyone just expects what they want.” It’s a tough life for the both of us, Shun muttered, unworried.

Bui looked out the window, and pointed a finger. “Hey look, Shun, the princess is outside.” Underneath the window, a girl walked a street lined with pear trees, a beautiful girl. Moving her slender, long legs, there was no hurry in her gait. Just in the act of walking, one could feel the refinement of her elegant movements. Dazzling blonde hair, pale, almost transparent white skin. Not a soul would pass by without looking back at her beauty. The sight of her walking with her female classmates in tow even gave off a sense of majesty.

Wearing a flowery, colorful girls' uniform, her features stood out even when surrounded by her classmates. Shun knew her. She was also quite a celebrity in the Academy. Lulithia Leshott Chambre — that was her name. She was positively radiant. She naturally emitted a powerful aura that attracted people's eyes. It's to be expected; after all, she was the daughter of Sharm IV, reigning king of the Kingdom of Juvren. She also happened to be an elite student, sitting in first place above all third year students at the Knight Academy. Same year as Shun, even the same class. But unfortunately, he had nearly never spoken to her.

Though they became classmates this year, it goes without saying that there were not many points of contact between a princess, nearly certain to become the next queen, and a poor student close to being expelled. For Shun, she was too awesome to behold, let alone talk to. "Colorful as usual...she really stands out, that princess." said Bui, giving his opinion. Lulithia was his classmate, but for Shun, she was too radiant a being. With high status, high scores, and beautiful to boot, one could only shoot straight past jealousy and sigh. "Dammit, with the princess in the same class, I thought I could make friends with her and become a knight by her mercy..."

Bui began muttering his ulterior motives. So that's what he was thinking, this buddy of mine. "Are you on friendly terms?" "Haven't even talked to her. There's always that scary looking guard beside her." The one Bui referred to was the tall girl walking behind Lulithia. Always obedient to Lulithia, the girl had her long hair knotted above her head. She was another one of Shun's classmates, by the name of Ange Petty. Apparently Lulithia's guard and servant, she always bore a sword sheathed in a scabbard at her waist. Students, as knights in training, were usually not around to carry a sword around at all times, but she seemed to have special permission. "Myself, I prefer ones like Lady Sophie". A tapping echo was heard. It was the sound of the shoes of a figure approaching from in front of them. As Shun saw who it was, he gasped. It was a beautiful girl. Her knight's uniform tightly adhered to her slender form, and the feminine lines of her body were clearly visible. She let her shining black hair make waves on her back as she walked; her thin, deeply colored eyes, shapely nose and the sharp line of her chin, everything was so beautiful that onlookers could but sigh.

Lulithia, the princess they saw before, was indeed a beautiful girl. But the girl

in front of them possessed a different beauty. For example, if Lulithia was a radiantly shining sun, this girl was a beautiful moon floating mysteriously in the darkness. Shun and Bui hurriedly moved to the wall and let the girl pass. Her deep ruby uniform was glamorously embroidered with golden thread, and stood out for its brilliance. It was the uniform of qualified knights, senior ones at that; it was a symbol of the elite that only they were allowed to wear. The girl's name was Sophie a Blanc Silver. She was also in the same year as Shun. More accurately, she used to be. As seen from her senior knights uniform, she was no longer a student of the Academy. Sophie, to put it bluntly, was a genius. Though admitted at the same time as Shun, having set new records in all subjects at the Academy, she skipped grades and graduated after only eleven months. Though Lulithia was top of the class now, it was Sophie while she was a student. Shun didn't know why Sophie, now an active senior knight serving at the frontlines, was back in her old stomping grounds. But all he could do was give way, salute her and see her on her way.

Having the path cleared, Sophie greeted them with a faint movement of her well-formed cheeks, and continued on her way with the tapping of her shoes...or so it seemed. For suddenly, she stopped in front of them.

"It's Mr. Harvest, isn't it?" The echo of her voice resonated the freshness of a soft, gentle breeze. Shun took a beat before realizing he had been spoken to by Sophie. "Yes, that's right..." As with Lulithia, he had never spoken to Sophie. Inside the Academy, anyhow. Shun chose his words carefully and continued. "Why do you know my name?" "I was enrolled at this academy until two years ago. I at least remember the faces and names of my cohort. You're Mr Banze, is that right?" she said, also mentioning Bui's name. Even her memory was stunning. "So, what business might bring you to us, Lady Sophie?" asked Shun.

It was customary for Academy students to address full knights as Lady or Sir. "It's not business as such, just that I met Count Muska and you came up in conversation. That you were going to do a resit," said Sophie. Shun only found out about it a little while ago, why did she know already?

"Yes, I will resit it next week..." "Is that right? Study at the academy can be very stressful, I wish you all the best. I look forward to the day that you become a full knight, and we can work together." Sophie bade them farewell, and left

amidst the echo of her shoes. After Shun and Bui watched Sophie's back as she departed, they looked at each other. "That's amazing, that's the first time I actually talked to Lady Sophie." No wait, Bui was so happy that his beloved Sophie had spoken to him that he seemed to be only flapping his gums, not making conversation. "And boy, did you hear? Lady Sophie said to me, 'I want to work with you'! That's basically a confession of love!" *It was clear that my friend was bending the truth to what suited him.* "Don't think she meant that she wants to work with you, just that it might be nice, ok?"

"You idiot, you don't get it. I mean, she was the one who spoke to us! That means, she's definitely interested in me. It means Lady Sophie's into me!" ... there were so many holes in his story, but Shun decided to let him off. Correcting him was going to be a hassle.

"Goddammit though, she was chatting with you the whole time! You, I'm so jealous!" Bui swung his arm around Shun's neck and began to squeeze. Pulled by the strong force, Shun began to lose his balance. Bui was fairly strong. Frankly, though they were apprentices, as Academy students chosen for their talent as knights, they were all in possession of abnormally strong arms. "Hey wait, that hurts Bui!" "Shut up, this is for hogging all the fun!" As he continued to spout selfish nonsense, he put more strength into his arms. *Can't breathe...* Of course Shun resisted. The two of them wobbled down the corridor as they messed about. Then suddenly, as they both put in the wrong amount of force, they lost their balance. They fell to the floor. That's when tragedy struck.

Bui fell directly onto the floor, but in Shun's direction was a flight of stairs. As they were messing about, they had moved to the entrance of the stairwell. *Oh no!* thought Shun, but it was too late. Having lost his balance, he fell down onto the long stairs stretching all the way to the lower floor, and rolled down with the momentum.

Roll, roll, roll, bang! "Eeek!" Crash...doink... he collided with something, and his fall finally came to a stop. He was saved as he collided with something soft at the end. *Thank god...but what was it?* He clung to it out of panic, it came out of nowhere, but it was so soft, so warm...boink...boink..."Wh..w, w, w, what do you think you're doing!" A metallic screech leapt into his ear. As Shun raised his face, he saw the face of a beautiful young girl in front of him. Radiant blonde hair, blue

eyes, almost transparent white skin. As those slightly twitching eyes glared at Shun from point blank range, the sweet aroma of flowers caught in Shun's nostrils. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Eh? Oh, umm... Ms. Lulithia?" The person Shun had collided with as he rolled down the stairs was, of all people, the princess of this nation, Lulithia. Shun belatedly realized that as Lulithia herself fell onto the floor, he had in fact fallen on top of her. The rather soft matter that felt so good was therefore the swelling of Lulithia's lush chest..."Umm, I'm, I'm sorry Ms. Lulithia! This was an accident..." "Of course it was! How the hell could this happen otherwise!" Beneath Shun, Lulithia had gone a bright red. Her blushing face was kind of cute...as he tried to put this in words, he was attacked by a shrill voice and a sharp sense of danger. "You beast!" Shun had a bad feeling about this, and promptly leaned all the way backwards. By chance, this turned out to be the right answer, as a lightning flash of silver flew past the tip of Shun's nose. "That's enough, get away from Mistress Lily!" Thus spoke a tall female student, the princess's servant Ange. She was normally quiet in the classroom and didn't show much emotion, but here, she burnt with a fury so fierce her hair might have stood on end, poised to strike with her sword drawn in one hand.

That silver flash was light reflected off the blade. "Woah, hang on Ms. Ange, that's a real blade!" "Of course it is! Now kneel, you insolent brute! You will pay for this savagery against Mistress Lily with your life!" said Ange, as she took the sword in both hands. This was not good, her eyes meant business. *Is she really going to kill me?* Shun quickly stood up and waved his arms. "It's a mistake, that was an accident, I didn't mean any harm..." "No excuses!" spat Ange as she swung her sword at Shun. *This was useless, I can't get through to her!* Shun instinctively rolled on the floor and evaded Ange's attack. "Wait, that's dangerous..." "How dare you try to escape!" "I'll die if I don't!" Shun was frantic. No matter how he looked at it, Ange intended to kill him. He could feel the deadly menace emanating from her. "It's time you accepted your fate! You coward!" "That's ridiculous!"

ILLUSTRATION

Trying to get away, Shun tripped over his feet and collapsed on the spot. Ange saw her chance, raising her sword high above her head.

This is bad, I'll get killed if I don't do something! Shun thought and reached out his hand. His hand brushed against a large vase standing on a table. The vase had a glassy surface emblazoned with an intricate painting. At this point anything goes. Shun pulled the vase towards himself, and raised it up as if it were a shield to take the blow from Ange's sword. "Hey!" looking shocked, Ange and her sword came to a sudden halt.

"Are you out of your mind!" Ange screams. She looked absolutely flustered. *I wonder what happened to her,* Shun thought and cocked his head in puzzlement, still holding out the vase.

"What are you doing!" It was Lulithia's voice, resembling half a scream. "That vase in your hands! It's an important vase donated to the Academy by His Majesty the Emperor of the neighboring country as a token of friendship! Scratch it, and they'll cut your head off!"

So it was such a precious vase! Come to think of it, in order to keep students from touching the vase, there was a fence around the table that the vase had been standing on. Desperately trying to get away from Ange, Shun had climbed over that fence.

"Aahahaha, I wasn't, you know, going to scratch this or anything..." "Whatever, just put it back! Before you drop it!" "As you say." flustered, Shun turned to face the table to put the vase back. However.

"What is this ruckus that I hear! When did the corridor become an amusement center!" A rough voice resounds in the corridor. When Shun saw the face to whom it belonged, he was about to drop the vase he was clutching in his hands - though he didn't actually drop it, thank goodness. It is a man. Dressed in the gaudy uniform of a high-ranking knight, the man has gray eyes and light brown hair, and on his waist he is carrying a sword in a gorgeous scabbard. The man is quite old, but his large build, broad shoulders and well-defined muscles make him look younger than his age. Shun knew the knight. His name is Perde Dan Saint Bris. He is the captain of "Order of the Apocalypse", the strongest chivalric order in the kingdom that only comprises the pick of the knights. In other words,

he is the strongest knight in the Kingdom of Jevren, holding the highest position of a knight. An elite knight, Perde is like a god to Shun. Now that celebrated knight was glaring at Shun without even trying to hide is anger and unhappiness.

"You, what do you think you're doing! That vase is not something a scoundrel like you should be touching!"

His angry voice resounds like thunder. Amazing force. It's like the roar of a beast. The vase was about to crack by the sheer force of that voice. First Sophie and now Perde, why were high-ranking knights loitering around the Academy today of all days, that Shun did not know, but all he could do was bow his head.

"I'm so-sorry. You see, this was, how should I put it, a state of emergency..." "Don't mess with me! That vase is a token of our friendship with the neighboring country! You scoundrel think you can just lay your hands on a vase that's more valuable than your sorry life!?"

Shun remembered the words Muska had said to him earlier that day. "Your current situation is quite delicate. Studying is of course important, but get yourself into trouble again, and you'll be expelled before the resit."

To have caused such a scene in front of the strongest knight in the kingdom... It's hopeless, this is definitely the end. I'll be expelled. "You rascal, you're a 3rd year student, huh. Give me your name and your class, now!" shouts Perde.

Shun had understandably half given up. However. "Pardon me, Sir Perde," Lulithia opened her mouth. That's when Shun noticed that Ange, who was supposed to be pointing her sword at Shun, had managed to sheathe her sword and was now standing behind Lulithia, looking unconcerned. *She only saved her own skin, how sneaky!*

"Uh, are you her Highness Princess Lulithia? Is something wrong, your Highness?" Perde turned around with a slightly bewildered look on his face.

Not even the highest-ranking knight could ignore the words of a princess, it seems. "I would prefer if you wouldn't shout like that. It's ungraceful."

"Pardon my impoliteness, your Highness. However, the actions of this man were far too unpardonable, so I unintentionally raised my voice," Perde said, giving Shun a stern, pointed glare.

However, the words Lulithia next spoke in a calm tone in front of Perde were surprising. "It seems you are mistaken. That classmate of mine has done nothing wrong." "What do you mean?"

"I saw it. That vase that he is holding. Perhaps because the table is wobbly, the vase suddenly tumbled over. He happened to pass by and caught the vase before it dropped to the floor. Isn't that right, Ange?"

"Yes, it is as Mistress Lily says," Ange nodded quietly to Lulithia who had calmly uttered those words.

Shun could not help but be surprised. Needless to say, Lulithia's words had all been utter lies. Why would she lie like this?

"Is, is that true?" "Yes, I saw it. There is no doubt... Or are you suggesting that I am lying?" "No, not at all..." Perde muttered in a quiet voice, as if shrunk by the words of the princess.

Shun did not know why Lulithia was covering up for him, but he felt like it had gotten him out of trouble now.

"That's how it is. If anything, his actions ought to be praised, not punished." "That is indeed true but... just how long are you going to be clutching that vase!" Perde raised his voice at Shun again.

He was right. Stunned by Perde's appearance, Shun was still holding the vase in his arms. "Ah, I'm sorry. I'll put it right back!" Shun bows his head to Perde with a forced smile on his face. As he glanced at Lulithia, her proud faced seemed to be saying , "Be grateful, you fool."

Well, Shun did not actually know how the princess felt about him, so he was only trying to guess her intentions. Maybe because of those unnecessary thoughts, Shun's hand slipped. The vase tipped over, falling off the table and straight to the floor.

"Hey!"

"Oh!"

Their screams piled on top of each other.

This is bad, this is seriously bad. A miracle won't happen twice. The vase

breaking now would place Shun in a desperate situation. Shun reflexively put his toes under the vase just as it was about to hit the floor, and kicked. Naturally he did not put too much power into his kick, only enough to fling the vase up without breaking it.

"You rascal, what do you think you're doing, kicking it!" Perde shouts, his face red like he was about to faint.

However, he should save his sermons for later. The vase Shun had flung up was spinning, about to fall again. Shun stepped onto the table in front of him and jumped. As he was leaping through the air, he reached out his hands and tightly caught the vase about to fall with his both hands. *All right, I made it. I won't fail again. I won't let go of this vase no matter what. Even if it means protecting the vase with my own body, then so be it!*

Swoosh.

"Hey, you..."

Crash.

Silence fell over them. Shun could not believe what had just happened before his very eyes. Shun had indeed kicked the vase while up in the air. He had held it tightly in his both hands as not to drop it again. The problem was Perde, who had moved straight below Shun while trying to catch the vase Shun had flung up. Perde was standing right below Shun as he fell to the ground with the vase. Obviously unable to change his course in the air, Shun fell on top of Perde. To make matters worse, the vase that Shun had tightly held in his arms hit Perde right on the head. It was as if Shun had been aiming at Perde's head and mad a dunk shot with the vase. After landing right before Perde's eyes, Shun looked up timidly. Perde was still standing before Shun without moving an inch. Maybe he's stupefied, Shun thought hopeful, but it was naïve. Perde opened his eyes wide and stared at Shun. Broken pieces of the shattered vase kept falling off from Perde's head and shoulders.

"You rascal, do you have something to say? Perde's voice had changed completely from his angry shout and it was now astonishingly flat. That made it all the more scary.

Shun replied with a forced laughter, "Well um, you see, Sir Perde, maybe if

your head had been softer, the vase wouldn't have broken, maybe." "Is my head that hard?

"Yes, for you to be completely fine even after getting hit on the head by a vase, I'd think that your head needs to be pretty strong."

"Muahahahaha, hahahahahahahaha," upon hearing Shun's words, Perde suddenly left out a laugh he could no longer contain.

"Did you hear that, Princess Lulithia? This man is surprisingly funny. He has some courage to speak such words with a straight face in this situation."

"...Indeed," Lulithia muttered, looking troubled as if wanting to say, "You idiot." Perde laughed, asking what is so weird. Shun also tried to summon a fake laugh. However. "Hahahahaha hahahahahahahaha hahahahahahahaha, this imbecile! You're out! Have your petition for withdrawal ready by tomorrow unless you want to meet the guillotine!!"

...No kidding.

-The following day "...and Mr. Harvest. Do you have something to say?"

"Ms. Muska, you look unwell, is everything all right?"

"I thought I warned you yesterday, yet you keep causing trouble, so my gastritis got worse! After yelling at Shun with a pale face, Muska swallowed stomach medicine while holding her chest. Maybe it was Shun's imagination doing things, but her face seemed wearier than yesterday even though it had only been a day.

"Um, Ms. Muska. I... What will happen to me now?"

"You'll be expelled."

"For real?"

"If you resist, your only option is beheading by the guillotine." Muska made a motion with her hand as if cutting her neck.

"I don't really want to say this, but have you any idea, how many people I've had to beg since yesterday? Bowing my head to teachers of the Academy, reaching out to old classmates, going down on my knees to beg the Principal, even using tears in the end, trying to get to speak to Sir Perde, but I couldn't

even meet him, let alone apologize... It's over, not even I can protect you this time."

"I see..."

"As your supervisor, I should also be writing my letter of resignation..." Muska buries her head in her hands. Does taking responsibility really have to go that far, Shun thought shocked.

"You might not understand it yet, but Sir Perde is so great a knight that someone like me can't even compare."

"I often see him sitting next to His Majesty the King during ceremonies..."

"Having survived the Northern War and won the title of a Sword Champion thrice, the man is a living legend and the strongest knight in the kingdom. He is said to have even more power than His Majesty the King himself in matters regarding the knights."

Shun again realized what a great man Perde was. So that means he had hit such a man on the head with a vase... He should probably be grateful that he still had his life intact.

"What are you going to do? If you get expelled like this, you won't even be entitled to your pension as a knight, what should I say to your parents in the countryside?"

"Um, Ms. Muska, I'm sorry. It was me who screwed up, yet I got even you involved..."

"Will you take responsibility and take me as your wife?"

"What?"

Muska said something preposterous.

"Managing to become a knight only to get sacked, and on the top of it nonchalantly going back to the countryside, that is too pathetic. I'll have no social standing if I don't at least find a marriage partner in the capital before going back home. I don't ask for much in this situation, so you'll do."

"Um, I'm sorry. I'll do anything but that, so could you please let me go?" "I was only joking, but to get seriously turned down hurts..." It was a joke? For a joke it

felt pretty real...

"In any case, unfortunately this is goodbye. Pack your belongings and leave before the day is over... I will probably do the same in a matter of days." "I'm really sorry, Ms. Muska."

Just go, said Muska and again took her stomach medicine with a pale face. Shun bowed his head and left the office.

"Hey, Shun, how'd it go!" Bui seemed to have been waiting outside and was now rushing over to Shun. Shun faced his friend and shrugged his shoulders.

"Expulsion. This time it seems to be for sure." "Are you serious, hey?" Bui's face was pale as he put his hands on Shun's shoulders. "Sorry, Shun. It's my fault..."

"Huh? You haven't done anything, right?"

"If I hadn't pushed you down the stairs, this wouldn't have happened, right?"

"Don't worry. I was the one who got Sir Perde angry."

Leaving the Academy without becoming a knight is sad, but nothing can be done about it now.

"I'm sorry, Shun... If there's anything I can do to help, contact me anytime."

Unexpectedly, Bui was looking at Shun with tears in his eyes. The usually bubbly friend seems to be feeling guilty this time.

"My folks are farmers, so there's plenty of food. If you have nowhere to go, come to our place in the country. You can eat till you explode."

"Haha, I'm fine. It's not like I'm without a place to go."

"C'mon, don't be shy. I've got a lot of siblings, so having you around wouldn't change anything."

"All the more reasons not to go, in that case." The corners of Shun's mouth turned down just enough to suggest sadness.

"Even if you have a lot of siblings, all kinds of problems will arise if you have an outsider in the family."

"What's that, speaking from experience?"

“Well, stuff happened in the past...”

“You’ve been through a lot, too.”

“But I’m glad of your offer, thanks, Bui.”

After shaking the hand of Bui who was unwilling to say goodbye, Shun left the school building behind. Walking along the tree-lined road to the dorm, Shun thought. Shun was definitely a poor student, and he had known it would be difficult to become a knight if he didn’t improve his grades. Yet having his dream of becoming knight taken away from him like this was sad.

“How should I explain this to my family...”

The reason Shun had entered the Knights Academy in the first place had been that it was a boarding school so his family would not have to take care of him, and he had also believed that after he became a knight, he could be of use to them. After being expelled, he could hardly look them in the eye...

“Yesterday I could hardly imagine that a day later things would turn out like this.”

“What?”

Shun heard a voice speak out of the blue, so instinctively he turned back and saw a figure standing in the shade of the trees.

“How is it even possible to make matters this much worse in the course of just one day, one can’t help but wonder.”

“Lady Sophie...” The figure belonged to Sophie. She emerged from the shadows with her arms crossed.

“Why are you here?”

“I hurried here as soon as I heard what happened yesterday.” As Sophie spoke to Shun, she seemed even friendlier than yesterday. This kind of an attitude felt more natural on her. Shun knew it was because it was closer to her true self. Until yesterday, Shun and Sophie had never conversed at the Academy. Yes, at the Academy. Due to one specific reason, Shun and Sophie are in fact familiar with each another. That is, however, a secret, so at the Academy they had always pretended to be complete strangers.

"A mere student making the captain angry, that is so reckless that it wouldn't have been odd of them to have killed you on the spot."

"So I've heard."

The person Sophie was referring to as the captain was of course Perde. Sophie is also a member of the "Order of the Apocalypse", the elite chivalric order whose captain Perde is. "Oh well, I guess something must be done."

"Huh, can you do something about this?"

"Well, I do have an idea..."

"Oh, here you are, Shunavran."

Surprised, Shun turned to look behind him. Did someone see him act friendly around Sophie? If so, it would be bad on many levels. When he looked behind, he was greeted with the sight of Lulithia with her lush blond hair fluttering in the wind as she walked. Ange was of course walking close behind her without saying a word. *Why would the Princess...?* Lulithia approaches Shun ignoring his doubts.

"You weren't in the classroom, so I came looking... Oh, is this Lady Sophie."

"Yes, it has been long, your Highness Lulithia."

Seeming like she just noticed the presence of Sophie, Lulithia made a bow. Sophie bowed her head and gave salutation as if nothing had happened.

"What brings you to a place like this, Lady Sophie?"

"I had work here today... Is my being here really so strange?"

"I think it strange that a person who has graduated many years ago would be here."

"Even so, I am the same age as you, Princess."

"Yes, that is true. I often forget it, for you look so old...I mean, mature."

"Your Highness, compared to me you appear very childish...I mean, youthful."

Smiling. Strained atmosphere.

What is this? They are both smiling and having a conversation, yet the mood is becoming heavy. Shun was puzzled, but the two girls continued their

conversation ignoring him.

“Having joined the “Order of the Apocalypse”, you must be busy as a bee, Lady Sophie. Having a walk in this boring school grounds, oh how busy you must be.”

“Yes, I am quite busy, seeing as we don’t have enough knights. Perhaps if you used your abundant leisure to become a knight, I would not be quite so busy, your Highness.”

“Hohohoho.”

“Hahahahaha.”

The tone of their conversation was getting more strained, and the air had turned somber. Shun had not known that the two girls seemed to be on such bad terms.

“Um...Lulithia, you came to tell me something?” Shun asked nervously, trying to lighten the mood. Lulithia seemed to have been looking for him, but...

“It was nothing important, really,” Lulithia said, putting her hands on her hips. That made Shun remember something. Lulithia had covered up for him yesterday. Although it had turned out to be futile in the end.

“Oh yeah, Lulithia, thanks for yesterday, for covering up for me.”

“That was nothing, really,” Lulithia utters while casually playing with her hair. Perhaps she was embarrassed, as she seemed to be turning her gaze away from Shun for a little bit. “More importantly, I heard the rumor. Of your expulsion.”

“Yeah, well,” Shun nodded, laughing. The word seemed to have gotten to his classmates already.

“What are you laughing at! You are not seriously thinking of obediently leaving the Academy?”

“It’s not that I want to leave, but there’s nothing I can do, right?”

“I cannot have you leave the Academy just yet. The game isn’t over yet.”

“What do you mean, what game?”

“Have you forgotten?”

“Forgotten what?”

After hearing Shun's response, Lulithia kept staring at him with a complex expression filled with shock, despair and a tint of discouragement. However, Shun did not know the reason behind her expression.

"Um, Lulithia, is something wrong?"

"...Hmm, nothing is wrong. It's none of my business if a mere classmate is gone."

She was clearly in a bad mood. Looking angry, she crossed her arms under her breasts and looked away with a "Hmph." Had Shun maybe done something to anger her?

"My, how disturbing. Is Mr. Harvest getting expelled?" Sophie cut in as if she was only now hearing about it, even though she already knew. Her slightly surprised expression was completely natural, so good it was that it almost got even Shun fooled even though he knew it an act. She was a gifted actress.

"I don't know the circumstances, but isn't that that bit hasty."

"It ought to be none of your business as you have already graduated, Lady Sophie."

"I may have already graduated, but I can't simply ignore an old classmate of mine getting expelled... Yes, let me talk to some people."

"Can you do something like that?"

"Yes, I do have some contacts."

"Having someone with your standing interfere with the affairs of the Academy is not good," Lulithia flashed out. My oh my, thought Sophie as she looked at Lulithia.

"In any case, weren't you also planning on helping him, your Highness?"

ILLUSTRATION

"D-d-don't be ridiculous. Why would I do something like that!?" For some reason, Lulithia shot Shun a severe glare.

"H-h-however, I, too, am not that narrow-minded. I would not say no if Mr.

Shunavran cried and begged me for help." Shun was puzzled by her sudden words.

"I wasn't going to ask something like that from you..."

"Are you truly going to say something reckless like not needing Lily's kindness?" Ange had somehow appeared behind Shun and was now speaking in a cold voice... She was seriously scary. Shun had no idea when she had appeared there, and the click he had heard was probably Ange gripping her sword. It was too disturbing.

"Oh, no, I... I want you to help me if you can, yes."

"It cannot be helped, then. Well then, seeing as I am not completely unrelated to this incident, I shall help you."

What an annoying person, Lulithia sighed.

What is it? Why is she putting on such airs when I was forced to say it?

"Surely it is not something her Highness should trouble herself with? I will..." Sophie was trying to insist when something in her breast pocket made a beeping sound.

"Excuse me... Hello? Yes, I see. I understand," Sophie said into the small board she had pulled out of her pocket. It was a "Magic Mobile", a tool created by magic engineering that allowed people in possession of the device to talk to each other no matter how far apart they were. She seemed to have received a call from somewhere.

"Something urgent came up, so please excuse me."

"Oh, is that so. May you have good luck at work."

Seriously speaking, Sophie was a very busy person, so it was stranger for her to be here than not. Maybe he had come in spite of her duties after hearing about Shun. Shun was happy she had shown care for him, but he didn't want her to strain herself.

"Come back here today first thing in the afternoon."

"Huh?"

Sophie whispered to Shun has she walked past her, and then disappeared. Remaining behind, Lilithia was giving orders to Ange.

“Ange, bring me paper and a pen immediately. I shall write a few words to His Majesty the King.”

“Yes, your Highness.”

“Mr. Shunavran, you stay in your room and keep quiet. Do not hit someone in the face with a vase like yesterday.” They don’t trust me, huh... Not that it’s unreasonable.

“But I have to leave the dorm already...”

“It’s just for one day, make something up!” Impossible. However, Lulithia said nothing more, as if making him know that their conversation was done, and quickly disappeared with Ange... Even so, why had Lulithia covered up for Shun yesterday and today too? Shun honestly had no clue.

“Well, whatever. It’s not like I’d figure it out even if I thought about it,” Shun whispered cheerfully and decided to kill time until afternoon.

Chapter 2: The holy swordsman, the family, and the secret

Chapter 2: The Holy Swordsman, the Family and the Secret Later in the afternoon, wandering around the campus, Shun ran into Bui again.

"Hey, isn't it you, Shun? What're you doing here?"

"Ah, Bui. So we meet again."

Having just said goodbye in the morning, it was awkward to run into each other again so soon.

"Did you by any chance come back because they forgave you?"

"I wish..."

"No chance, right," Bui whispers after seeing Shun's gloomy expression.

"So, what're you doing here then?"

"That's...I, you know, started to miss this place when I thought how I have to leave."

"Oh, right." Bui seemed to buy the explanation, but for Shun things were a bit worrisome. He had come here in the afternoon just like Sophie had told him to, yet he had to run into someone he knew right now, of all times. The place was also more crowded than usual, and it would be impossible to have a conversation even if Sophie did show up.

"What're you doing here, Bui? Shouldn't you be in class?"

"Did you forget? Today's classes were over at noon."

"Oh right, I think there was a notification about it before..." Shun had been so preoccupied with his own problems that he had completely forgotten.

"Some foreign big shots are coming to observe the campus today, so for security reasons students with no business to be here were told to beat it."

So that's why there had been so many students making their way to the

dorms. "The reason famous knights like Lady Sophie and Sir Perde came to the academy yesterday was to plan for security."

"I see."

People coming to observe the academy was nothing out of the ordinary. Known as the Kingdom of Knights, Juvren's knights were the most skilled knights on the continent. The Knight Academy was also internationally acclaimed as the educational institution training those knights. Therefore many foreigners visiting the kingdom seemed to be keen on observing the campus.

"Hey, do you know who's coming to observe the campus tomorrow?"

"No clue."

"The Goodwill ambassador of the Shamune Empire, that's who!" The Shamune Empire is a country bordering the Kingdom of Juvren to the east. The neighboring countries had a relatively amicable relationship.

"But didn't the ambassador of that country already visit before?"

"The ambassador did. But this time he comes with his companions. Important people are coming, so the knights are really busy taking care of it.

"Important people?"

"The best knight in the Shamune Empire, the strongest swordsman on the continent - the Holy Swordsman."

Shamune Empire is also known as the Sword Empire. As the name suggests, the empire had always been strong on fencing. This was most clearly manifested in the system called the Common Swordsmanship Examination. It is a kind of technical skills test, commonly known as the Sword Exam. The examination measures a knight's swordsmanship skills, and skilled knights are granted a title. The examination is quite influential and internationally recognized. The Holy Swordsman is the highest title in the examination. The title can only be held by one knight on the continent, making it the title every knight was dreaming of obtaining.

"The Holy Swordsman.. that Holy Swordsman? He comes all the way to see this

school?" "I heard that he himself requested to observe this place," Bui explained. "The Holy Swordsman is the best knight in the Shamune Empire, a true VIP. Such an important person is really coming all the way here. Even the higher-ups are on edge."

"I figured as much." Speaking of which, the vase Shun had broken the previous day had apparently also been a gift from the neighboring country. Probably from the Shamune Empire. Perhaps it had been put on display because the Holy Swordsman is coming. "Hm? Who is it?"

"Huh?" Bui pointed front. Over there standing in the shade of a tree was a girl they had never seen on campus before. She appeared about 10 years old. She was a slender, petite girl. She had astonishingly fair skin, and her hair was a light gray as if its color had faded. Her hair was so silky that it would flutter even in the gentlest breeze. She had lovely features, and she looked like she could be mistaken for a fairy.

However, her face held no expression, and she seemed mature for a child.

"I've never seen her before. She can't be a student here. A girl like that would stand out."

First off, her clothes were different. She was wearing light green clothing that revealed her snow white shoulders. Compared to other students wearing their uniforms, she was clearly different.

"Let's just try talking to her."

"You sure?"

"Hey, leave it to me. I have a lot of siblings, so I'm good at dealing with brats."

"Isn't it mean to call her a brat?"

"Huh? What're you getting angry at?"

"Nothing." He didn't mean to get angry, but he was maybe being a bit emotional. Bui ignored Shun with a "Whatever" and approached the girl.

"Hey little girl. What're you doing here?"

"..." The girl stared at Shun and Bui from below. Her expressionless face showed no emotion. Emotionless, she just kept staring at them.

“Are you lost? I can show you around.”

“Are you hitting on me?” the girl whispered. Her voice was quiet just like her appearance. Looking surprised, Bui waved his hand.

“Huh? No no no, that’s not it, I’ve no intention of hitting on you, relax.”

“...That’s what men always say.”

“No, seriously, I’m not like that, I swear, I swear, I swear!”

“You’re too shaken up, it’s suspicious.” The girl steps back as if trying to get away from Bui. Bui looked at Shun with an expression pleading for help.

“Sorry, Bui... You look suspicious to me, too.”

“Rude!”

“Huh?”

“...”

The girl was pinching the cuffs of Shun’s uniform with her small fingers.

“What is it?”

“I can go with this guy.”

“What! Why is Shun okay but I’m not!”

“I wonder why, hahahahaha...” Shun forced himself to laugh as Bui was losing his cool. Frankly speaking, Shun knew this girl. However, the truth was a secret, so he had to feign ignorance. It was the same as with Sophie.

“Shit, what’s going on. Shun, you’ve been getting all the girls lately. Wait, your expulsion was a punishment from the gods for being too popular with girls, that has to be it,” Bui launches into a tirade. Even if he was biased, that was still a horrible thing to say.

“Ah,” muttered the girl.

“What’s wrong?”

“They found us.”

“Huh?”

“She’s here!”

A gust of wind blew past, and the next moment people appeared before them. Those people were moving so fast that the wind pressure made a violent gust of wind sweep over them.

There were three of them. They were all robust men. Each of them was wearing the uniform of a royal knight and carrying a sword on his back. You didn’t often see them on campus, but they seemed to be actual knights.

“We found her. Third Block in the north. She doesn’t seem to be injured,” one of the knights spoke to his Magic Mobile. Meanwhile another knight approached the girl, kneeling down to talk to her.

“May I ask you to return, Holy Swordsman?”

“...” The small girl answered the knight’s question with a stare stripped of emotion.

“Huh? ...Hey, Shun, what’s going on? That knight just said...”

“This girl seems to be the Holy Swordsman.”

“This kid?” Bui shudders in horror. It doesn’t probably make much sense to him to hear that this little girl before them is the strongest knight on the continent. Although Shun did know it from the start...

“Students, huh. Get lost, you two,” a knight with his eyes fixed on Shun and Bui told them in a high and mighty manner.

“This lady is not someone you guys can just go up to and have a nice chat with! Leave, now!” the knight proclaimed, treating Shun and Bui like a nuisance.

Shun was not too happy about it, but talking back to an official knight was out of the question.

“Let’s go, Shun.”

“Yeah.” Shun decided to simply leave... However.

“You shouldn’t go.” The Holy Swordsman girl stopped Shun.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“...Because it’ll probably be here soon,” the girl muttered looking up. Not

knowing what she meant, Shun was utterly confused.

“What should we do?”

“Our mission hasn’t changed. Let’s take her to the original place.” The knights were talking among themselves. The girl remarked, “Everyone, you shouldn’t move. It’s already here.”

“What is?” The girl raised her gaze without saying a word. Shun followed her gaze and saw something glimmering high in the skies. A shrilling sound traveled the air. It appeared to be coming from the Magic Mobile of one of the knights. It seemed like an emergency buzzer.

“Yes, hello...Yes. What did you say? Air warning net? But that’s ridiculous!” Shun could hear panic in the knight’s voice. Meanwhile the mysterious object shining in the sky was becoming larger... Ooooooooo, bang! A terrible shock ran over them. The gigantic thing had come crashing down.

“What’s going on!”

“Monster! There’s a monster!” The knights scream and shout. Meanwhile a black shadow had suddenly fallen over Shun and the others. They heard a deafeningly loud sound. It only took a moment for them to realize that it was a roar let out by the creature before them. A massive creature had appeared. Many times the size of a human, it was like a house. You could say it resembled a lion. Only it was many times larger than a lion, and it had massive wings on its back. It probably flew here on those wings. Its body was covered with fur that was like wire, and it had opened wide its jaws large enough to swallow multiple people at once, threatening the people around it. For a living creature it was all too big, and just looking at its frenzy and brutal appearance was enough to make one fall into despair. A monster – a creature not originally from Burgund. During the Northern War, the Demon Lord bought monsters from the Dark Continent to this continent to used them as weapons. During the war, these monsters were weapons used to torment the mankind. Even after the war ended and the Demon Clan was banished from the continent, the monsters remained. Rather, with no enemies to hunt them, the monsters were able to freely roam Burgund and breed, occasionally attacking humans and becoming an international problem.

“You filthy monster!” Unafraid of the monster that had appeared so abruptly, the three knights moved swiftly into positions to corner the monster. They were communicating with mere looks as they drew out their swords and aimed them at the monster like the professionals they were.

“You, get out of here! Do you want to die!” one of the knights shouted at Shun and Bui who hadn’t escaped yet. Shivering in fear after witnessing a monster at close distance from the first time in his life, Bui pulled Shun by his clothes.

“Hey, let’s get outta here! It’s dangerous here!”

“You go first, Bui,” Shun shook off Bui’s hand and ran to the opposite direction.

“Hey! Idiot! Where do you think you’re going!”

“I can’t just leave her!” The petite girl with gray hair remained cool and composed even in such a situation. She looked at the monster as if it bored her, not even trying to move. Shun hurried to her side.

“Hey, we need to escape.”

“...I won’t escape,” the girl said promptly. Shun suddenly felt like screaming.

“It’s pointless to escape now. You’ll be expelled.” Shun did not really understand what she meant.

“Alright, keep up with me!”

“We get it!” The three knights confronting the monster all gripped their swords. The handles of their swords slide, made a metallic sound. Simultaneously small shell cases came out from the side. The next moment a blue light wrapped the three knights. “Imperial Clock” The three knights moved at the speed of sound, starting a glorious battle against the enormous monster. “Imperial Clock” is sorcery. It is a technique that allows one to forcefully boost their physical abilities by overloading the “Mana” flowing in one’s body. Using this technique enables knights to move and think at abnormal speed. Only knights can use this technique, so to put it the other way around, only those who possess the qualities needed to use the “Imperial Clock” can become knights. However, the “Imperial Clock” requires a large amount of “Mana”, and even among knights those possessing a large amount of “Mana” in their body are

rare. Therefore nowadays “Mana” is artificially produced in factories and then processed and turned into “Mana Bullets” used in swords. These bullets are used in combat to guarantee enough “Mana” for “Imperial Clock”.

The three shining blue knights were moving around the monster at ultra high speed, watching for a chance to slash at the foe in the commotion. While two of the knights were distracting the monster, the remaining knight slashed at it from behind, and if the monster turned around, the opposite knight attacked without a moment’s delay. Knights in “Imperial Clock” mode can move freely like the wind, so fast that an ordinary man would not even be able to see them. Even though Shun was a bad student, he was still an apprentice knight which meant that he was able to follow the knights’ movement with his gaze.

“...No good,” the gray-haired girl muttered next to Shun.

“They can’t win like that.”

“But the knights seem to be on top of their game?”

“It’s no good,” bitter words fell from the girl’s small lips. The next moment they heard a loud bang of something heavy crashing. The monster was swaying its arms like large trees. The arms were enormous yet swift as they moved, hitting one of the knights without giving him a chance for counter-attack. With just one hit the knight’s body was slapped onto the ground, rolling as if boring holes to the ground as it was blown off into the distance.

The monster had started to emit a blue light like the knights. That’s right, monsters born with a large amount of “Mana” in their body can also use the “Imperial Clock”. That is why monsters can only be beaten by knights.

“Shit, it’s Fred!” shouted one of the knights, thrusting his sword into the monster’s direction. However, the monster simultaneously sways its opposite arm, counter attacking the knight.

“Haaaaaaa,” another knight saw his chance and attacked with his sword from behind, thrusting the sword into the enormous monster, or so it seemed.

“No good,” the girl muttered. At that moment the knight’s body was catapulted into the sky. “‘Cave Lion’ has a wide field of vision. It doesn’t have any blind spots.” The last knight standing was knocked out right before Shun’s eyes.

The fallen knights lay sprawled on the ground, not trying to get up. It was a desperate situation. In the blink of an eye three formal knights had been left unable to fight.

Yet people remaining are Shun the failed apprentice knight and Bui who lost his chance of escape from being paralyzed with fear. Moreover, the Holy Swordsman girl standing behind them was unfortunately unarmed. They couldn't even escape, let alone beat the monster. However, there was a sword lying on the ground in front of Shun. It belonged to one of the knights to took a beating. Unhesitatingly, Shun picked up the sword. "Confirm...." "Deliberate...." Shun heard a voice inside his head. It was a voice he sometimes heard when he was extremely nervous. Other people didn't seem to hear it, so considered it some kind of an auditory hallucination. "Deliberation....Complete...." ".....Return." To Shun the auditory hallucinations were a forewarning of something bad. Whenever he heard this voice, something bad was going to happen to him. After hearing this voice in an exam during his first year at the academy, he got the worst grade the history of the school.

After hearing this voice at the end of his second year at the academy, he suffered an unbelievable 78 consecutive defeats in combat training. It was so bad that he was only able to advance to the next grade out of pity. Now he had heard the one voice he did not want to hear in such a situation. It was too sinister. The monster was roaring before Shun, trying to intimidate him. He was honestly scared. Shun's skills may not be enough to have a real battle. However, the sword goes off with a bang. Hot "Mana" flowed in Shun's body... He had no choice but to do this. Only Shun was able to protect the girl now. In that case, if Shun didn't do it, who would have!

"Alright, monster! I'm your opponent..."

"You don't need to do that." The girl standing behind grabbed Shun by the arm. Her grip was surprisingly strong and almost made Shun fall down.

"What do you want!"

"It's dangerous to go further."

"But I have to fight."

"Tin will fight so just stay back."

The girl – Tin – uttered and quickly grabbed the sword from Shun’s hand. Without showing any signs of fear, she approached the raging monster. Losing control of himself, Shun jumped to shield her. Shun didn’t even have a sword, so the monster could crush him into pieces with one hand. There was nothing Shun could do... He should have known it very well, yet his body moved on its own. Wanting to protect Tin no matter what, he went to block the monster. However.

“It’s dangerous for you to be there.”

With a loud bang, the monster fell on its knees right before Shun.

“I already killed it, so it’ll fall this way.”

Split in half, the monster’s body fell to the ground with an earth-shaking thud, black blood gushing out. The monster was obviously dead.

“Ha, hahaha...” Shun can’t help giving a laugh... It all happened so fast that he didn’t know when Tin had killed the monster. It was so amazing that laughing was really the only reaction he was capable of. Tin glimpsed at the sword in her hand. Few drops of blood had stained the sword that had pierced the monster.

“Here,” Tin said and put the sword back in Shun’s hand who was just standing still. Shun accepted the sword without moving. Shun heard noise from a distance, and he felt a large number of people coming near.

“This is where we got the call from!”

“Where’s the monster!?”

“It’s already dead!”

“What happened!”

Confused voices filled the air as dozens of knights rushed to the scene a moment too late. The knights had all arrived after hearing about the appearance of a monster, and they were all prepared for action with their swords drawn out.

“You rascal, what’re you doing here!” the person raging at Shun is Perde, who has arrived with the other knights by his side. He seemed to remember Shun’s face very clearly. This was bad.

“Ah, um, ahahahaha, what a coincidence...”

“Well, whatever, now is not the time to be dealing with urchins like you!”

Perde spat out, glaring at the scene with sharp eyes.

“What’s the situation here!”

“Monster ‘Cave Lion’ came through the air warning net. We have just identified its dead body.”

“To have allowed it to get this close to the king is a disgrace! Summon the person in charge of defense immediately!” Perde shot instructions at the knights with a grim face.

“And where is the lost Holy Swordsman?”

“We were informed that she is here...”

“...You called me?” Tin quietly stepped forward. Perde grimaced.

“Your running around on your own hinders the amicable relations of our countries.” “I saw a monster flying and got intrigued and came to check what’s going on,” Tin replied without flinching.

“I see... Are you not hurt?”

“I’m fine. Because that guy saved me.”

“Huh?” Tin had suddenly pointed at Shun. Perde’s eyes were about to pop out.

“What did you say?”

“That guy killed the monster.”

“Is, is that true? This man did something so inordinate?”

Perde stared at Shun in disbelief. He fixed his eyes on the bloody sword in Shun’s hand. Shun replied fluster, “It’s, how should I put, I didn’t really...”

“He beat the monster with one blow. He’ll surely become a great knight.”

Hearing the Holy Swordsman’s words of praise, Perde let out a groan.

“That is... However, that man...”

“Captain, is everything alright?” The voice belonged to Sophie. She had joined the other knights to get here.

“Lady Sophie.”

“The three knights who first came to report the incident are being taken care of. They were attacked by the monster and injured, but fortunately their wounds are not life-threatening.”

“Take them to the infirmary immediately. Ask them about the incident after their wounds have been treated.”

“Yes the dead body of the reported monster has been confirmed, so the threat seems to have passed.”

“Leave the cleanup to the disposal unit. Keep guarding the area and don’t let your guard down.”

“Understood.”

Sophie nodded and briskly stepped back. Even though she was among knights who were clearly older than her, Sophie showed no restraint, and instead even gave orders to the other knights. Although young, she looked like a woman capable at her job.

“Let us also go now for there are other people waiting for us,” Perde and Tin hurried away accompanied by a group of knights... As Perde was about to take his leave, he gave Shun a glare. Shun told him to take care, which made him look increasingly sullen, and then he was gone.

“Did it go well?” Sophie had appeared behind Shun. In a small voice that can only be heard by Shun she whispered, “Tin also seems to have done a great job.”

“Did you do something, Sophie?”

“I’ll tell you later... However, there should be no need for you to submit an application for withdrawal now.” Sophie said no more and left without making a sound. After she was gone, a fair scent like flowers in spring filled the air.

By the way, the knights had protected Bui who had been too frightened to escape. Fortunately, he was unhurt.

That night – the Royal Palace of Bernard Pi

The king and the royal family live in the palace, and it is also the place where large numbers of knights gather and government affairs are carried out. It is the center of the kingdom. A report was given in its most important room, the State

Chamber where the king and his knights gather to make various decisions.

“Because of the aforementioned reasons, the monster that broke through the air warning net of our country was slain on the grounds of the Knight Academy in the eastern part of the royal city.”

Perde was the one giving the report. He continued with a stiff expression, “Reinforcements were immediately placed to the line of defense where the problem occurred. The same situation may not occur ever again.”

“Good if that really were the case,” a solemn voice replies. It belonged to the man sitting on the throne at the far end of the chamber – the current monarch Sharm IV.

The king was an old man. His face was covered with wrinkles, but his body was so toned that one would not think it belonged to an elderly man. A thick moustache framed his dignified face, making him appear regal.

“Damage caused by monsters is increasing every year.”

“We are doing everything we can, but I am afraid it is difficult to handle all monsters that have the ability to move about freely.”

“Hmm. I do believe that the knights are doing their best with limited manpower.”

“The knights must be pleased to hear those words.” Perde and the rest of the knights in the chamber all bowed their heads.

“Regardless, a monster appearing upon the arrival of an imperial envoy poses a problem. We were witnessed in the most unpresentable state.”

“I can only offer an apology. The persons in charge have been dismissed. We are all going to work diligently to keep this from happening again.”

“Hm, it is consoling to think that the Holy Swordsman was not injured at the scene,” the king opened his eyes as if having realized something. “Indeed, when I met the Holy Swordsman a while ago, she was extremely pleased. I heard she had met an extraordinary student at the Knight Academy.”

Perde was looking down, but his eyebrows twitched. It was because the king’s words rang a bell.

"Faced with a raging monster so strong that it had taken down three knights in the blink of an eye, the student was not agitated, and instead slew the monster with a single stroke, I hear."

"...That must have been sheer good luck." "Really? As a knight you ought to realize the brutality of the monster, Perde. Usually multiple knights are needed to beat that monster. It is a marvelous achievement for someone to slay it alone, and a mere apprentice knight at that."

"If luck is also considered a skill, it is as you say, your Highness."

"Quite a severe judgment, Perde." The king stroked his beard and continued, "Both the Holy Swordsman and the Imperial Ambassador sang the boy's praises, marveling how in the Kingdom of Knights even apprentice knights are extraordinary. It made me feel quite proud."

"...I have no words to express my gratitude for those generous compliments."

"Now, who is this extraordinary student?"

Perde's eyebrows twitched again. The face of Shun came to him, the face of the student who had hit him in the head with a vase the other day.

"He is..."

"His name is Shunavran Norve Harvest, your Highness," someone replied. Perde turned around and saw Sophie sitting at the end of the table and raising her hand.

"Lady Sophie, I thought I told you refrain from speaking unnecessarily!"

"No, let her talk. You have my permission," the king urged Sophie in order to silence Perde.

"Lady Sophie, do you know this student?"

"Yes, he is the same age as me. We took classes together in the academy."

"Is that so. Indeed, not even two years have passed since you graduated the academy."

Looking at the king nodding made Perde feel sick. The youngest person in history to become a knight and even allowed to attend political meetings, Sophie

was the apple of the king's eye. It was thanks to the support that Sophie had been able to get so far so young. Perde was not too happy about it.

"Now tell me, is the boy extraordinary?"

"As far as I am aware, he possesses both qualities required from a knight. Kindness and a strong heart. His justice-loving heart is parallel to none, surpassing every knight." Sophie commended Shun's spirit before Perde could speak, and the king became increasingly delighted hearing Sophie's words of praise.

"If Lady Sophie so insists, then he must be an extraordinary man." This is bad, Perde thought. He could not simply proclaim that in reality, Shun was the bottom of the class. "However, it is interesting that the boy is the same age as Lady Sophie. It seems your generation has many excellent knights."

"Yes, Princess Lulithia is also our peer, so there are many excellent students who have been inspired by her."

"I see. Hahaha, oh dear. This makes me a silly parent doting on his daughter. Isn't it so, Perde?"

"...Not at all, Princess Lulithia truly is extraordinary." That was the only answer Perde could give. The king adored his young daughter. One must not have a slip of tongue. "Oh, that brings to my mind," the king claps his hands. "The student called Shunavran. I thought I had heard the name somewhere before, and I remember it now. Lulithia mentioned in a letter that I received this afternoon."

"From the princess?" A cold sweat appeared on Perde's forehead. It didn't promise well. The situation was not favorable to Perde.

"Hm, Lulithia wrote in her letter than she has an excellent classmate who has been expelled due to an unfortunate misunderstanding. I reckon that student was called Shunavran."

"..." Perde had feared that this story would become public.

"Hear me, Perde. I do indeed love Lulithia. However, I do not intend to give her special treatment. When I read the letter, I did not know what misunderstanding the student was a victim of, but if the academy has so decided, I will not interfere."

“...Is that so.”

“However, having heard what the Holy Swordsman and Sophie have to say, I cannot but consider him a truly extraordinary apprentice knight. Is it true that this student will be expelled?”

“...I am not aware of everything that goes around at the academy, I’m afraid. You ought to consult Sir Effy, the principal, if you wish to be sure.”

“Hm... Alright then. By the power vested in me as the King of Juvren, I shall knight this student called Shunavran.”

“What...what did you say?” Perde’s face had turned pale like a corpse. However, the king calmly said to Perde, “he killed a monster by himself, surely he is more skilled than even a high-ranking knight. According to Lady Sophie, his character is also impeccable. I do not mind such a person becoming a knight immediately.”

“Your Highness... I’m afraid skipping a grade is an old custom rarely practiced these days. Lady Sophie’s case is an exception. We should not permit exceptions frequently.”

The king seemed to take Perde’s words into consideration.

“Hm, right now is perhaps too hasty... Well then, I will exempt him from the graduation examination.”

“As you will.” And thus the meeting ended in a manner that was truly objectionable from Perde’s point of view.

The next day at the Knight Academy

“I did not expect to see you again.”

“Me neither, Ms. Muska.” Shun had yet again been summoned to the office, and was now confronting Muska.

“How on earth did you do it? This morning all of a sudden I was summoned by the principal who told me that your expulsion has been revoked.”

“I didn’t really do anything... But this means I don’t have to leave the academy

now, right?"

"Yes, in fact the principal told me to never let you go. What does that even mean?" Muska shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, fortunately my letter of resignation also became invalid, so I'm glad."

"So if I resit the exam next week, I'll be able to take the graduation exam?"

"Actually, the resit got canceled."

"What do you mean? If I don't resit the exam, I can't graduate..."

"Calm down. It's not bad news," Muska explained.

"I don't really understand it myself either, but there was pressure from the higher-ups to ensure that you become a knight... So it's not just the resit, you've been exempted from all exams."

"Huh? Huh? Huh?"

"In other words, you have been knighted unofficially. If you keep on attending classes, you can graduate without an examination and become a knight. It's written in stone."

"Is that even possible?"

"Not usually, but excellent students may be exempted from the graduation examination. The royalty and nobles are sometimes exempted."

"...That sounds a bit lurid."

"Don't tell anyone that I told you."

Maybe Shun was imagining things, but Muska seemed healthier and more energetic than ever before. She was a complete different person from the gloomy woman always troubled by stomach-ache.

"How should I put this... Having to deal with you has taken so much of my time until now, your whole existence has been like a thorn on my side and I've pretty much considered you a problem child, but I'm deeply moved by your unofficial knighting..."

"Ms. Muska, did you think about me that way..." Shun had not known that he had been such a burden to Muska.

“It hasn’t really hit me yet, but I’ve really become a knight, right?”

“It’s pretty certain that you will become a knight at this point. I just want to make this extra sure, if you cause any trouble now, your knighting may be canceled, so behave yourself. ”

“No need to remind me...”

“Have you already forgotten what you did two days ago!”

“You are right.” That incident had led to this. Shun had to be careful. After being reminded to be careful by Muska over and over again, Shun was finally free to leave the office.

“...Ah.”

“....”

As Shun was making his way back from the office, he noticed Lulithia walking towards him from the opposite direction. She was walking quietly with Ange right behind her. Even though she was merely walking, there was something about her that made her different from the other students. Her movements as she walked were effortlessly elegant. For a moment, Shun’s eyes met Lulithia’s. However, Lulithia quickly turned her gaze away, and continued to walk as if nothing had happened, walking past Shun without saying a word. “Thanks,” Shun turned around to say a word of thanks to her back. Lulithia finally stopped.

“It was nothing.”

“Still, I’m grateful.” Shun thanked her again, but Lulithia turned around as if to say something more important.

“The rumor has it that you slew a monster all by yourself?”

“Huh? Ah, yeah, right, well, you see...” Shun stuttered. The one who killed the monster was the Holy Swordsman girl, Tin. However, Shun had received the glory. Many people had asked him how he really beat the monster, but he tried to make something up every time. “You see, I was just completely absorbed in wielding my sword, and then I somehow just killed the monster, you know, hahahaha...”

“...”

This is bad. Lulithia had sunken into silence, and Ange was looking at Shun with suspicious eyes. This was bad. This fabricated story was not believable.

"Now, now, I just got lucky, really."

"...I would not expect anything less from you, Mr. Shunavran," Lulithia surprisingly praised Shun.

"I want to see those monster-slaying skills of yours in class one day."

"Huh? Oh no, you are a straight-A student, so I am nothing compared to you..."

"That is not true, I am aware of your outstanding abilities."

"What?"

Why is she overestimating me all of a sudden?

"Yes, I know your powers..."

"Um, what do you mean?"

"I look forward to dueling you in class." Lulithia smiled sweetly like a flower, excused herself and quietly walked away. Shun was left there cocking his head in puzzlement. However, no matter how hard he tried to think, he was not able to come up with an answer. Lulithia was a princess but also his classmate. Shun was supposed to have no connection to her, yet somehow they had become close enough to have a normal conversation. The self-important attitude of a princess and her enigmatic words were sometimes a bit annoying, but other than that, talking with Lulithia wasn't all that bad. Shun was also a guy, after all. Who wouldn't be happy if a beautiful princess spoke to them... The easy-going Shun truly believed so.

"Shun, you going somewhere?"

"Yeah, I'm thinking of visiting my parents to share the news."

The following weekend, Shun was packing up in his dorm room.

"Ah, right, you were unofficially knighted... Shit, I'm jealous," Shun's roommate Bui grumbled. The rumor of Shun's unofficial knighting had quickly spread among his classmates, leaving many students ponder why Shun had been

chosen.

“Yeah, my family promised to throw me a party, so I asked for a permission to spend the night off-campus and go home.”

“Hey, how do you get knighted unofficially? I wanna become one, too.”

“Well, in my situation, it was sheer luck...”

“Damn you, acting modest. Just wait, I’ll pass the graduation exam and become a knight!”

“Yeah, I’m looking forward to it.”

Shun had finished packing and was preparing to leave.

“I’ll be off then.”

“Have a safe trip.”

“Yeah, see you.”

“Hey, Shun.”

“Yeah?” Slightly blushing, Bui turned around and said, “congrats on your unofficial knighting.”

“Yeah, thanks. Bui.” Even though this friend was jealous of Shun, he was also happy for Shun’s unofficial knighting. That realization made Shun even happier than the unofficial knighting. After saying goodbye to Bui, Shun left the dorm.

All people have secrets. There is no person who doesn’t have any secrets. More precisely, you cannot live in as a member of society without creating secrets. There are small secrets and big secrets, but Shun was aware that compared to other people, the secret he held is quite big. Shun was walking at the outskirts of the royal capital. This area is the target of a development project, and in the future the royal capital will expand here, but as of now it is still mostly vacant land. It is night. Large “Magic Lanterns” have been placed along the road, so night in the royal capital is illuminated.

“Magic Cars” drove past Shun. “Magic Cars” are four-wheeled vehicles that run on “Mana”. They have experienced significant development in the past few years. Even small cars are quite expensive, so the general public cannot afford

vehicles. Regardless, quite many “Magic Cars” run the streets of the royal capital day and night. Moreover, large “Magic Cars” are used to public transportation in the capital. Shun also traveled by “Magic Car” from the academy to the capital. This advancement of magic technology showed how well-developed the royal capital was. Shun could already see his house. There was a single house with a red roof standing in the middle of a vacant land. That was Shun’s house, the current home of his parents. This house holds Shun’s big secret. Light was shining through the window. Shun’s family seemed to be home already. Shun stepped inside with his heart pounding.

“I’m home...”

“Shun, welcome home.”

The first person to greet Shun was a woman with a particularly carefree manner of expression.

“We heard it! You’ve become a knight!”

“I haven’t been knighted yet. It’s still unofficial.”

“It’s all the same to me! Amazing, Shun. Your big sis is really happy!” the woman approached Shun, reaching out to Shun’s head with her hands and pulling him into a hug.

“Hey sis, what are you doing!?”

“What, just showing you some sisterly love.”

“Sis, stop it, you’re touching me all over the place!”

“It’s alright, this is your reward for working so hard! I’ll tell you you’ve been a good boy, just like when you were little!”

“I’m not a kid anymore!” Her feminine and voluptuous bosom pressed against Shun’s face, making Shun feel embarrassed, awkward and all around uncomfortable. She seemed to enjoy Shun’s reaction, putting more force into the hug, and petting Shun’s head as if he was a child. Her name was Aria Nico Boltule. She was Shun’s family member and three years his senior. They have a different surname, but that is because of the situation Shun is in. Aria is about the same height as Shun. She has wavy hair with a tint of red, and she is always

smiling. She is a beauty for sure, but her aura of innocence made her easy to approach. Aria was wearing a white, see-through bow blouse and a pair of skinny jeans. Even among the siblings she had grown the quickest, and you could see her curves even through her clothes. Although currently those curves were pressed against Shun's face. Shun was in trouble. "Little Sister Kick!" Shun got kicked in the butt. The kick made Shun lose his balance and trip over to the floor. Oh my, Aria whispered and quickly got off Shun, so Shun alone fell to the floor.

"Why do you get all flushed when hugged by Aria, Shun?" Someone spoke to Shun in a determined voice. Holding his butt, Shun got up and turned around to look at the person the voice belonged to.

"That was mean, Chro."

ILLUSTRATION

"Ha! I thought things would get better once you became a knight, but I was wrong. Shun is still the stupid Shun I knew from before"

A small girl was looking up at Shun from below. Her blonde hair is tied up on the side. She was born with odd-eye, or different colored eyes, one red, one blue. Her black dress had many frills. She had a bright appearance. Chrollo Rorosé Dange. She is Shun's sister, often called Chro.

"Also, don't forget, you're just Shun, don't call me by my first name!"

"Ok, but Chro, you call me by my first name too, don't you?"

"Of course. You're useless Shun. Compared to a genius like me, you are worthless. I can call you by your first name if I feel like it."

She hasn't changed a bit, thought Shun. She is the youngest girl in the house and for some reason, she always rebels against Shun. "Awe, Chro-chan, you seem so embarrassed"

Watching over Chro, Aria was smiling with her hands on her cheeks. "Chro-chan was really excited to see you back here Shun. She was walking around the entrance for a while. But because you were so late, she's a bit angry."

"Argh, Aria! I told you not to say that to Shun!"

“You don’t have to hide it Chro, you’re so cute” Aria tried to tap Chro on her head, but Chro refused with all her might. This was a familiar family scene for Shun. Seeing this made Shun feel right back at home.

“Well, let’s celebrate, Shun is becoming a knight. We are going to party tonight. Tin-chan will cook her best meals tonight.”

“Nice”

“Hey brother, welcome home.” A girl appeared from the kitchen. She was a small girl with shiny grey hair. She was the holy swordsman Tin, Tin Da Loris. She became a sword master when she was only 10. She was the youngest person to become a sword master. She is Shun’s sister, and also one of the best swordsman in the land.

“Hey, thank you Tin. It’s been a day, right?”

“Mhm. Dinner’s ready.”

“You cooked for me? Thank you always”

“No problem. I like cooking.”

Tin is Shun’s younger sister. She is 1 year older than Chrollo. When he met her on campus, she was dressed properly, but at home Tin wore no-sleeve turtleneck with a pleated skirt. She wore a blue apron on top. Her pale slender arms and legs stood out. At the kitchen, there was a gorgeous meal prepared, just like the sisters said. Shun took a seat at the end of the table. After all, this was a dinner to celebrate his achievements. Aria, Tin, and Chro arrived, but there was one more seat left. Somebody is not here.

“Well, Shun is already back, so let’s start.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, we can wait, but she seems pretty busy these days...” Shun was about to say they should wait, then...

Thump!

“Sorry I’m late, I was working late.”

“Hey there, welcome home Sophie-chan.”

“You’re late!”

“Welcome home sister”

There stood a beautiful girl that shines like a full moon in the night sky. She had shiny hair. An almost transparent white skin. Thin chin like a doll. Eyebrows with an elegant curve. Eyes like the blue sky. Lips like the flower of a cherry blossom. Every part of her face was perfect, it was like art. Shun knew her, because she was his sister who was 1 year younger than him. She is Sophie a Blanc Silver, an upper-class knight in the First Knight Army “End Knights Army” of Juvren. She was still wearing her knight outfit. She must have came straight from the Royal Palace. She was sweating too. She was probably in a rush to come home. “Well, now that Sophie is back, let’s get this party started.” So with every family member at the table, Aria began Shun’s celebration dinner. Yes, this is Shun’s secret. Sophie is an extremely talented girl who graduated earlier than anyone from the academy and got a position at the Royal Palace. She broke many records at the Knight Academy of Juvren. Tin is another talented girl who became the youngest “Sword Master” in the Shamune Empire. She is said to be the strongest swordsman in the land. They are both sisters of Shun. But this is top secret. They are the only ones who know about this secret. But unlike his sisters, Shun was almost expelled from the Knight Academy. He was a loser. He isn’t anything like his sisters. Even more, he didn’t have the great looks like his sisters. Aria and Chrollo are both talented as well in their own fields. In terms of social status, Shun doesn’t stand a chance. Realizing all of these, Shun felt a bit disappointed.

“What’s wrong Shun? You seem down.” Said Aria, looking at Shun’s face. Holding a glass with a red liquid, Aria came over. She seems pretty happy.

“You’re drinking quite a lot.”

“Of course, today is a day to celebrate~. You should drink too Shun-chan~”

“No, I’m okay”

“Come on, come on~” Aria poured alcohol into Shun’s glass anyways.

Well, just a bit won’t hurt, thought Shun. “

Bro, you seem depressed” said Tin.

“You don’t like the food I cooked?”

“No, it’s delicious” This was true. Tin can handle a sword and cook too. When the family gets together like this, it’s usually Tin who cooks up a meal.

“This is beef boiled in red wine. It’s quite tasty” Tin said confidently. Shun took a bite of the beef. It crumbled down in his mouth. The taste of the meat was still there, and the slightly sour taste wrapped up everything quite nice. The butter melted in the sauce added an even richer flavor. “Yes, it’s so good. But when did you have time to cook something like this?” There were many dishes on the table. It was hard to believe she cooked all of these in a short amount of time. “Well I’ve been in this country for a while now, so I popped out whenever I was free and prepared it.”

“Free time... Do you get a lot of those at the Friendship Mission?”

“Yup” nodded Tin... It was uncertain how she managed her time, but with her brain, it was probably possible.

“Oh, about last time”

“Hm?”

“It’s dangerous, so you shouldn’t step in front of me”

Was she talking about when we were attacked by a beast? Shun did take a step forward to protect Tin.

“Well, I know Tin is stronger, but my body just moved”

“You shouldn’t push your luck though, you can’t defeat the beast anyways”

“Urgh...” Shun choked on words. It’s true, but hearing it straight like that hurts.

“You’re weak”

“Urgh”

“Even if you’re upside down, you can’t beat Tin”

“Urgh”

“You should stay quiet and out of Tin’s way”

“Ugh!”

Tin doesn’t mean to offend him. She is just innocently telling the truth. But that was more reason to hurt Shun.

“...But I was a bit happy to see you do that”

“What?” Shun couldn’t hear the last words, so he lifted his head up. Tin had already stopped talking and was eating her meal. She had no expression on her face, so Shun couldn’t see what she was thinking.

“Shun, pass me that bottle”

“Yes, yes” Obeying Chro’s orders, Shun grabbed the black bottle on the table---

“No, not the alcohol bottle!”

“Pour it in my glass” Chrollo pointed to her glass on the table arrogantly. Shun noticed her face was turning red. She was already drinking.

“No Chro, you’re too young”

“Shun, stop arguing with me!”

“Hey~ it’s okay. Let’s celebrate today, forget about rules~” said Aria irresponsibly. She seemed pretty drunk too.

“Chro is too young to be drinking!”

“Tin is drinking too!”

“Huh?”

“Hm” Tin was drinking from her glass too. Her face didn’t change color, so it was hard to tell.

“Shun, you’re a man, stop being so paranoid!”

“It’s not about being paranoid, I just think it’s not a good idea for a child to drink...”

“Ha! You always treat me like a kid! You don’t see me as a sister. Shun is the only one here without blood ties”

“Chrollo!” Sophie snapped. Chrollo put her hands on her face as if to say “Oh, I wasn’t supposed to say that”.

The room was filled with awkwardness. Shun is the only one here without blood ties. It's not like anyone clarified it before, but Shun had a pretty good idea. Compared to his talented sisters, Shun was clearly inferior. All of them had traits that were seen in their parents, but Shun had nothing similar. Shun always knew this, and so did everyone else in the family. That's why it was a taboo within the family. It was an unspoken agreement. "Hahahaha, Chro, you're such a baby" Shun laughed out loud to clear the air. "Fine, just a little bit" Then he poured liquor into her glass.

"Th.. thanks" said Chro and started drinking.

"Shun-chan~ pour me a glass too~ just one more~" Aria continued, pointing to the glass on the table. Shun said "Fine", and poured some more liquor. Tin kept a cool face as if to say, "this is none of my business", and Sophie was slightly glaring at Chrollo.

Before long, they returned to eating as if nothing had happened.

Yes, it's better this way, Shun thought. He was finally seeing his family again after so long. Nobody would want to have strange troubles stirred up because of him. Chrollo kept casting flickering glances at Shun, as if she had something she wanted to say but didn't know how to say it. Shun guessed that she wanted to apologize for her slip of the tongue, but strangely, he didn't want her to — in fact, it bothered him that she was still worried about it. In this situation, pretending that nothing had happened was the best solution.

"Chro, do you want to drink a little more?"

"Hmm? Oh, um... sure."

"Just as a special treat for today, okay?"

"H-hmph, if you want to pour me another drink that badly, I suppose I'll allow it!" Chrollo replied, finally reverting to her usual manner of ordering Shun around. With that, the mood in the room returned to normal. Feeling relieved, Shun poured some sake into Chrollo's glass. ...But, after a short while, he began to somewhat regret having felt relieved.

"Geeeez, Shuuun, you're just way too sloppy!" For some reason, Chrollo was now sitting on Shun's knee, her face bright red. For some unknown reason,

having drunk too much alcohol and gotten quite tipsy, she had decided to come sit on Shun.

"Shun, you're perfect for the role of my chair!" she declared as she boarded.

Well, all right.

Chrollo had certainly sat on his lap quite often when she was smaller, and she was still petite enough that she didn't feel heavy on him now. Perhaps because of the alcohol, her temperature seemed a bit warm as her body heat seeped into Shun, but that wasn't unpleasant either.

"You just can't do anything without my lovely presence, do you realize that?"

"Ah, yeah, that's true."

"Even this time, when you dropped out of school and Sophie contacted you, that was all part of my brilliant plan!"

Of course — so Chrollo had been the puppetmaster behind that time, Shun realized. She might have been the youngest of them, but true to her boasts, Chro really was the most intelligent of the bunch. And she had often served as the brains behind Shun and the others.

"Shun, you still make the same stupid face as always... Really, you're just soooo hopeless!"

"Uh-huh, but that doesn't really matter to me, Chro. It's Tin who you're talking to right now, you know."

"Mm?" Probably thanks to her drunkenness, Chrollo seemed to have mistaken Tin, who was squatting in a chair impassively, for Shun.

Nevertheless, Chrollo, still seated on Shun's knee, breathed out a long "Harrumph".

"Well, a piece of garbage that becomes a knight is still always going to be garbage!"

"Isn't that pretty insulting towards Ruby?"

"Well, I can't help it, I've spent my whole life looking after garbage! Look, if you understand that much, you should be thanking me through sobs of gratitude,

Shun!"

"What about Ruby?! And also, it's still Tin you're talking to, so..."

"Mm." Tin was drinking sake expressionlessly as she listened patiently to her sister's speech. Still sitting on Shun's lap, Chrollo may have been drunk, but she seemed to be having fun as she cackled aloud and wobbled back and forth. That was all well and good, but her little bottom was moving about so violently that he was a little worried that she would fall off of his leg. Nonchalantly, he slid an arm around Chrollo's waist to ensure that she wouldn't fall. Drunk as she was, Chrollo completely failed to notice that Shun was touching her.

"..."

"Really, you're awfully quiet today, Shun. Hey, Shun. Why don't you try talking a little? You drink something too, come on now!"

"..."

Chrollo was picking a fight with Tin now. Generally the taciturn type, even Tin seemed to be growing a bit irritated, as she was subtly knitting her brow.

"Erm, hey, Chro. It might be about time to call it a night and go to..."

"You're so annoying, Shun! I happen to be talking to Shun right now, so don't interrupt me, Shun!"

"Uh, there was definitely something wrong with that statement."

"Hey, Shun, hurry up and drink something, right now!" Chrollo forcefully shoved a bottle of sake toward Tin. Tin had been silent for some time, but unable to endure it any longer, she snatched the bottle out of Chrollo's hand.

"Fine..." Incredibly, Tin started to drink straight out of the bottle. Now Shun became flustered. "Tin, stop, you can't drink it like that!"

"...It's fine." Only about half of the bottle's contents remained, but Tin drained most of it in one gulp, slamming the empty bottle down hard on the table. There was no sign of change in Tin's composed expression... no, upon closer expression, her cheeks may have turned just a bit pink.

"..."

Tin then reached for Chrollo, grabbed ahold of her by the back of the neck, and lifted her abruptly.

"Yow! What do you think you're doing?!" Chrollo struggled violently, but Tin held her up easily with one hand. For a master swordsman like Tin, holding up one small younger sister was probably no large feat. Although, small as Chrollo might be, there wasn't a huge difference in stature between them.

"...having ten sisters is a nuisance," Tin muttered, tossing Chrollo onto the bed. With that, she went over to the astonished Shun and planted her bottom on his knee.

"Huh? Tin, what's the matter?"

"...This is Tin's spot now," she answered, claiming the territory that Chrollo had sat in until a moment ago. For some reason, Tin's face looked pleased. It was an expression that rather seemed to say, "I finally get what I've been denied all this time, bahaha!" --No, Tin would never make a noise like "bahaha", but somehow or another there it was.

"...wh, waaaaaaaah! Tin stole my seeeeeat!"

Chrollo cried out shrilly from her position on the bed. She must have been drunk still, because she was crying like a child. In terms of age, it had to be said that Chrollo really was still a child, but it was unusual to see her cry like this when she normally acted so grown-up.

"Aah, Chro, it's okay..."

"...big brother, don't you dare get up," Tin said from Shun's knee, stopping him as he was about to stand. Certainly, if he stood up now Tin would fall off, but...

"Waaaaah, Ariaaaaaaaa, Tin is, Tin iiiis...!" With tears in her eyes, Chrollo ran up to Aria, who was drinking alone at her own leisurely pace.

"There, there." With practiced ease, Aria began to comfort her young sister. "Now, now, you were sitting there for quite a while, right? Don't you think you could let Tin have a turn?"

"But, but, I had him fiiiiirst!"

"Well, if you put it that way, didn't you steal him from me even though he was

mine before either of you were born? I'm the one who should be feeling hurt, don't you think?"

"What are you saying all of a sudden, big sister?!" This was starting to sound like they were debating over some kind of first-come, first-serve sale.

"Why, if only I could, I'd like to push Tin aside and have that seat for myself!"

"I'd rather you wouldn't, to be quite honest..." Unlike with Tin and Chrollo, who were still children, having the fully-matured Aria sit on him would be all kinds of trouble for Shun...

"Come again? What is that supposed to mean, Shun? 'You're heavy, so I'd be crushed if you sat on me,' is that it?"

"That's a scary look in your eyes, sis..." Now he was being fixed with an angry glare.

"How cruel, Shun! I want nothing to do with you anymore!" With a "Huff", Aria pouted childishly and faced away from her brother.

Now I've done it, Shun thought, despite feeling that he hadn't really done anything particularly wrong.

"Zzz..." Shun heard a soft thud and felt something warm against his chest. Looking down, he realized that Tin had fallen asleep on his lap and was snoring lightly with her head resting on his chest.

"Ah... did you fall asleep, Tin?"

"...mm." She made a small noise in response, but she seemed to be mostly unconscious. Thinking back, Shun realized that she had been drinking steadily for most of the night, after all, finishing off by downing half the bottle in one go. She had probably just gotten drunk and fallen fast asleep.

"Tin... If you're going to sleep, do it in your own room, will you? You'll catch a cold," Shun said quietly but firmly to the snoozing Tin, but as she seemed to be totally passed out already, there was no response.

"Come on, wake up." He prodded at her slightly flushed cheeks, which seemed to bounce back somewhat elastically against his fingertip. It was an overall pleasant feeling, as her skin was very soft to the touch.

"Tiiin..." Poke, poke.

After a while of repeated prodding, Tin let out a little groan. "...mmn."

Poke, poke, poke.

She seemed to be on the verge of waking, so he gave it a few more tries. This did not exactly yield the response he'd expected.

"...mmf." Acting on some truly bizarre misunderstanding, Tin had chomped her mouth down on Shun's prodding finger.

"Huh? Hey, Tin, my finger's not a piece of candy."

"...mmr." (Shup, shup.)

Shun thought maybe she'd gotten tired of chewing on his finger, but that wasn't it. In fact, she seemed to have latched on to it, and was sucking on Shun's finger as if it was indeed some kind of candy.

...Huh, the inside of a person's mouth is kinda soft, Shun thought to himself absentmindedly, having never experienced this situation before. Inside her mouth, Tin's soft tongue wrapped around Shun's finger, a ticklish but somewhat pleasant sensation.

(Shup, shlup, shup...)

For Tin, who was normally so taciturn, to be sucking on Shun's finger seemed unimaginably childish, like a baby suckling on its mother's breast. ...Maybe Tin was lonely after all, since they'd lost their mother...

"Ahem. Just what have you been doing for the past few minutes, big brother?"

"Huh? Ah, Sophie?!" Without his noticing, Sophie had risen up behind Shun, and was peering intently at him and Tin. It may have been Shun's imagination, but her face looked rather grim.

"Ah, no, this isn't — I wasn't doing anything weird..."

"What kind of a brother makes his baby sister suck on his finger? Pretty strange, if you ask me..." Sophie folded her arms and stared Shun down coldly. She'd gone unnoticed in the midst of the drunken and boisterous group of Chrollo and the others, but Sophie too had been in the room the whole time. It

was quite possible that she'd been watching Shun's entire interaction with Tin from the beginning.

"No, I mean, this is just, uh..." (Shup, shup.)

"Get your finger out of Tin's mouth at once! This is a health issue here!"

"Ah, sorry." When Shun hurriedly popped his finger loose, Tin let out an inexplicably suggestive sigh.

"Okay, but just for the record, I washed my hands right before dinner, so it's not like my hands would've been dirty, okay?"

"I understand that. And I wasn't particularly trying to say that your hands were dirty..."

Sophie trailed off into a mumble for some reason. "...I mostly meant it was an issue of my own mental health..."

"Huh?" "It's nothing." Somehow Sophie seemed a bit sullen. *What was this all about?*

"Oh my, Chro's fallen asleep too~" This remark came from Aria, who had been busy comforting Chrollo. Upon closer inspection, Chrollo too was snoring away in Aria's arms.

"Well then, I guess we can bring the day to a close now, hmm~?" Neither Shun nor Sophie had any objection to Aria's words. Sure, the children were asleep, but Shun and the others too were long since finished with their meal.

"...aah, I might've had a bit too much to drink myself..." Aria's steps were dangerously wobbly. "Are you okay, sis?"

"Mmm... I'm fiiine, but could you take Chro for me, pleeease?"

"Yes, of course," Sophie responded, accepting the sleeping Chrollo into her arms. With that done, Aria staggered on her way. "Okaaay, we can tidy this up tomorrow, so I think it's about time for bed~"

"Yeah, sure, good night."

"G'night, sis."

"Mhmmm, good niiiight~" Still wobbling away, Aria returned unsteadily to her

room on her own two feet. Shun and Sophie exchanged glances. The living room was a bit of a shambles from all of their eating and drinking, but nobody much wanted to clean it up now. "...well, let's just get these kids to bed for now."

"Yes, let's."

Together, Shun and Sophie set off for Chrollo and Tin's room — Shun carrying Tin, Sophie carrying Chrollo. To the strength of a knight, one petite little sister was no large burden. Shun and his next-youngest sister walked down the hallway.

"...Everyone seemed to be in unusually high spirits today, huh?" It was unusual for Aria to get so drunk that she could barely walk, and Tin and Chrollo had totally drank themselves under the table. Shun had never seen any of that before.

"Well, they were all really happy."

"About what?"

"About their big brother becoming a knight."

"What? Why would you say that as if I should've known already?"

"Well, Tin and Chrollo were pretty worried about your future, after all."

"...I'm sorry I'm such a bad older brother."

"There's nothing to apologize for. Besides, you did manage to get that tentative job offer, right?"

"That's true."

"Actually, big brother... I didn't really get a chance to say this before, but congratulations. I'm happy that you were able to become a knight, too," Sophie told him with a smile. Her words came as a bit of a surprise, so even Shun was caught off guard.

"Ah, yeah, that's... um, thank you." Getting a little embarrassed, Shun kept his eyes forward as if to carefully dodge the subject.

"Ah... at any rate, Tin is really passed out, huh?" Tin was snoring away as she lay fast asleep in Shun's arms, her silver hair swaying back and forth with the

rhythm of his steps.

"When she's asleep like this, she looks pretty childlike... you wouldn't think she was a master swordsman at all."

"That's because she's with you," Sophie replied easily. "She's sleeping so soundly because she trusts her big brother. If it was me carrying her, she probably wouldn't be so fast asleep."

"You don't really believe that, do you?"

"Yes, I do. Out of all of us sisters, Tin is the most sensitive to the presence of others. You might be the only member of the family to whom she'd show such a vulnerable side of herself."

Sophie spoke with such confidence that Shun made no attempt to object any further. After that, they put Tin and Chrollo to bed in their own rooms. Then, saying goodnight to Sophie, Shun went back to his room in the corner of the first floor. It was a plain room, containing only a bed, a wooden desk, and a chair; it didn't seem very lived-in, but there was no helping that. They'd bought this house a few years ago so that Shun and his sisters could live together, but after its purchase, the time they spent in it all together was probably not even a month. As a student at an academy for knights, Shun was ordinarily living in a dormitory, and everyone else was at least as busy as he was, so in the end it was rare for all of them to be able to come back to the house.

"I might've drank a bit too much," Shun mumbled to himself as he sat down in the chair. He hadn't drank as much as Aria and the others, but he'd still certainly had his share of alcohol. Not having a very high tolerance for it, Shun had been walking a little unsteadily himself. Now he reached for the desk drawer, and turning the key that unlocked it, he pulled it open and took out its contents: a single photograph. This photo was Shun's most treasured possession, and it contained his greatest secret. If anyone else were ever to see it, Shun would be ruined. Considering that danger, it would probably be better just to burn the photograph, but... Shun could never bring himself to destroy it. At that moment, there was a knock on Shun's door.

Who could that be? he thought at first, but out of everyone in this house, there was only one person who would come looking for him now.

"Sophie, is that you? Come in."

"Thanks, big brother." Just as Shun had expected, it was Sophie who opened up the door. She had already changed out of her knight's uniform into a comfortable set of pajamas, and was holding a tray with a pitcher of water.

"I thought you might be thirsty, so I brought you some water."

"Yeah, thank you."

"I boiled some curcuma, too. It's bitter, but they say it prevents hangovers." It seemed that she'd noticed that Shun had drank too much, for which he was grateful. He accepted both the water and the medicinal concoction.

"What were you looking at?"

Sophie's gaze had turned to the photograph in Shun's hand. With a nod, he showed it to his younger sister.

"...A picture of everyone?"

"Yeah. It's the only copy left."

It was a picture of a certain family gathering. It was a big family, at least ten people all together; notably, most of the people in the photograph were women. The photo seemed to have been taken in the middle of a forest somewhere. In the center stood a man and woman who appeared to be the parents, surrounded by children of various ages. Chrollo could be seen standing on her tiptoes, straining with all her might to look taller. The other girls in the photo were all Shun's sisters, too — his family.

"I wonder where our other sisters are right now."

"That's a good question... I'm sure we don't need to worry about Viognier, at least." Shun noticed that Sophie's voice had hardened just a little.

"Are you still on bad terms with Vio?"

"It's not that we're on bad terms... I just don't understand the way she thinks." Sophie looked discouraged. Because of certain circumstances, none of the sisters who weren't currently in the house had stayed in touch. In the end, they had all scattered in different directions after a big argument. Even now, Shun regretted what had happened. Because of him, his once-close family had gotten

all... no, enough. There was no point in grumbling about it now...

Sophie's hair swayed in front of Shun's face. Seeing this, it finally occurred to Shun that Sophie was still standing.

"Ah, I'm sorry, Sophie. You can sit in... well, this is the only chair, huh." Indeed, there were no chairs in the room but the one that Shun was sitting in. Shun thought that maybe he should move to the bed so that Sophie could have the chair, but...

"No, there's a seat right here." As if it were the most natural course of action, Sophie seated herself on Shun's lap.

"Err..." Without thinking, Shun almost dropped the glass he was holding. She was a bit heavier than Tin or Chrollo had been, and as a result he felt her contact with his body that much more directly.

"Uh... what exactly are you doing, Sophie?"

"What, Tin and Chrollo can sit here, but I'm not allowed?"

"No, it's not that you're not allowed, but... don't you think this is kind of bad?" Tin was still definitely a child, so he hadn't really taken much notice, but Sophie was another story. While not as much as Aria, Sophie's body had definitely developed, and the feeling of her soft bottom on his lap was kind of nice...

No, don't go having any weird thoughts, Shun told himself. You can't start having weird feelings towards your own sister!

"...big brother," Sophie murmured. Her bittersweet scent drifted over to Shun, and he felt his heart pound with no real meaning.

"Wh... what is it?"

"You seem awfully close with her Highness Princess Lulithia."

"..."

Was now really the time to be asking that? Shun instinctively felt the urge to run away, but Sophie was still sitting on him, so that would be physically impossible. "N... no, not really?"

"Is that so? It looked to me as if you'd gotten to know each other quite well."

"No, I don't really think so. Before I knew it, she just kind of started talking to me."

"So it's this pattern again, huh?" There was some astonishment in Sophie's voice.

"You sure have a way of getting close to girls quickly like that, don't you?"

"I don't think that's really the case..." Still, having grown up in a family with lots of sisters, Shun was admittedly more at ease talking with women than with men.

"Sophie, it doesn't seem like you're on very good terms with Lulithia, either..."

"...that's true. there are reasons for that."

"Like what?"

"...I wanted to spend more time at the academy with you, but because of her I had to graduate sooner..."

"What do you mean?"

"No, there's no point in talking to you about that. Please don't worry about it."

Saying that just made him more curious, but...

"More importantly, big brother, I noticed that you haven't been very lively."

"Huh? That's not true."

"You looked like you were thinking about something else all day. Tin was worried about it too."

"..."

"Are you unhappy that you accepted our help and became a knight?"

"No, I wouldn't say I'm unhappy, exactly..."

Sophie, Tin, and even the always-bossy Chrollo had all come through for him, and for that he was honestly happy.

"But, you feel bad because it seems unfair?"

"A little, yeah..."

"Well, it's all right, big brother."

From on top of his lap, Sophie gave Shun an embrace, and the softness of her chest crushed up against his body.

"Wh-what are you doing, Sophie?"

"You and I are family. It's normal for a family to help each other out when they're worried about something... You really should depend on me a bit more."

Both her breasts were squished up softly on Shun's chest. It was a nice feeling, but that was definitely no good. Shun tried to pull away, but couldn't do a thing with Sophie's arms wrapped around him.

"Uh, hey, S-Sophie. Could it be that maybe you're pretty drunk yourself?"

"I might be." Sophie giggled, and a smile spread across her face that was more lovely than any Shun had seen before.

"It is true that I'm certainly intoxicated right now... intoxicated by my big brother's existence, that is."

"Just how drunk are you?!" Shun screamed internally. Now that he thought about it, without talking to anyone during dinner and while watching Shun's entanglement with Chrollo, Sophie had actually been drinking at a pretty fast rate.

"You're warm, big brother."

"Yeah, well, that'll happen when someone is clinging to you." With the upper parts of their bodies pressed so closely together, he could distinctly feel both their temperatures rising. At the same time, Sophie's bust bulging against him certainly wasn't helping.

"S-Sophie, settle down... come on, calm down, would you?" Shun said, flustered, but Sophie's arms were wrapped tightly around Shun's neck with no intention of letting go. On the contrary, she had brought her lips quite close to Shun's ear, so that they almost brushed against his earlobe as she spoke in a sweet whisper.

"I am perfectly calm, big brother."

"But..."

"I might not look it, but I am quite capable of calmly assessing the situation —

after all, since Aria, Tin, and Chrollo all drank so much, everyone else in the house should be asleep by now. In other words, that means there's nobody left to come in here and interrupt us."

Damn, this is bad! Shun thought. He had figured that Sophie was thoroughly drunk, but she was still able to think surprisingly clearly. Still, just what exactly was she planning on doing in his room?

"Hey, big brother... it's finally just the two of us."

"Uh... yeah, that's true." What was this feeling? As she embraced him, Sophie's body gave off a sweet scent that was making Shun feel dizzy. Unable to shake her off, he had the distinct feeling of prey that had been captured by a snake.

"Mmm..." Sophie's head came closer to Shun's chest as she let out a long sigh, which only made her scent even more overpowering.

"Wh-what are you doing, Sophie?"

"I'm feeling your existence as closely as I can."

"Uh, is that right..."

"You spend so much time on Tin and Chrollo lately, you never take time to keep me company."

"Yeah, uh... sorry about that."

"So, you'll keep me company tonight, then?"

"...Huh?"

"You will, right?"

"Err..."

"Won't you?"

Sophie's eyes were welling up with tears. Hastily, Shun nodded.

"I will, I will, for as long as you want, okay?"

"Yes, thank you." Sophie grinned.

...huh? She'd been crying just a second ago... Shun had the feeling that his sister had pulled one over on him.

"Okay, big brother... let's go to bed. Then we'll do something really good," she murmured into his ear. Shun wished she would quit breathing into it like that. To be honest, it sent a shiver up his spine.

"What kind of something, exactly?"

"It's something that you used to do for me at times like this, way back when..."

"Uh... you don't mean...?"

"Well, big brother? Let's go to the very limit of ecstatic pleasure."

And so...

"...So, this is what you meant by 'something good,' huh?"

Nestled up in bed, Sophie was sound asleep next to Shun, her breath slow and quiet. She had both arms wrapped around her brother, her face looking very peaceful as she slept.

"I guess I did share a bed with you sometimes when you couldn't sleep back then, but..."

Their relationship should definitely be taking a different form by now, but here they were, with Sophie using Shun as a body pillow. Her face was pressed up against his chest, so that he could somewhat feel the warmth of her breath.

"...Well, I guess it's okay once in a while. Just for tonight." Thinking back, Shun realized that he hadn't been able to talk to Sophie at all since coming home today. Maybe he'd made her feel lonely. As far as sleeping together, I should be glad to do this much for her, Shun thought as he looked at Sophie's sleeping face in the trace of moonlight that came in through the window.

...Then, the light from the window shone onto the top of his desk, where it fell on the photo that Shun and Sophie had been looking at before. The group may have been a little bigger than average, but aside from that, it was a normal enough family photo. And from that perspective, it seemed like a charming scene. But if anyone else were to look at it, the sight of the people in the middle of the photograph would surely put them ill at ease. There, surrounded by her children and wearing a gentle smile, was a woman: Shun's mother. But there was something distinctly strange about her. Stretching out from under her long hair

was a long, winding pair of horns. It was clear that she wasn't human. The mother of Shun and his sisters was actually a demon — the greatest natural enemy of mankind, you might say. She had been the main culprit behind a huge war that had swept across an entire continent a few decades ago: the ruler of the land of darkness, the "Demon Lord". The man next to her, Shun's father, was a human, but he had a secret too: he was the legendary hero who had clashed against the Demon Lord, the "Heavenly Knight". Mankind's greatest hero, the "Heavenly Knight", and its greatest enemy, the "Demon Lord"... the fact that they had borne children was the enormous secret that Shun and his sisters carried.